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America's Best
New Restaurant page 34

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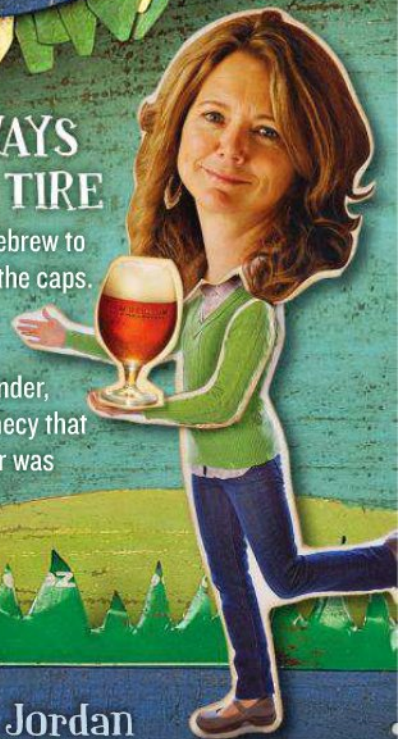
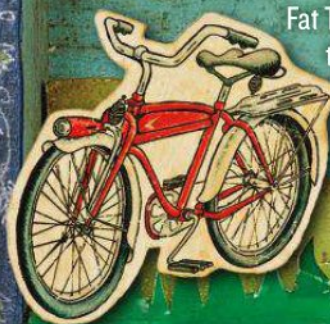


THE BEER THAT

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED FAT TIRE

We began by taking mixed cases of homebrew to parties – their abbreviations written on the caps. Everyone always searched for “FT”.

Fat Tire was the go-to beer even then. Now 20 years later, I wonder, was it coincidence or prophecy that this perfectly balanced beer was born on a bike?



FAT TIRE co-founder, Kim Jordan

RIDE ON TO HAP

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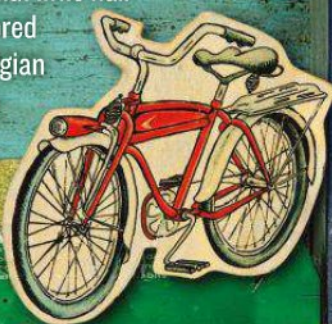


BRINGS US JOY



I'VE ALWAYS HATED FAT TIRE

It's the hardest beer for us to make. It's still a homebrew recipe. The hop/malt balance required makes me pull out what little hair I have left. But, last night as I savored Fat Tire Ale, all was forgiven. The Belgian inspiration, the elegance – it's worth every ounce of frustration.



Peter Bouckaert, brewer of **FAT TIRE**

PINESS AT NewBelgium.com



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FOLD HERE →

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EXCELLENCE 85% COCOA & ZINFANDEL

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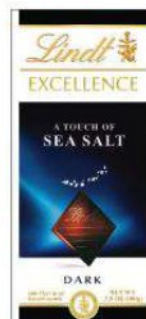


Beloved for its luscious aromas of blueberries, blackberries, warm cinnamon and toasted oak, Zinfandel fuses

with the red berries and savory herb notes of Lindt Excellence 85% Cocoa.

EXCELLENCE A TOUCH OF SEA SALT & RIESLING

Opposites attract

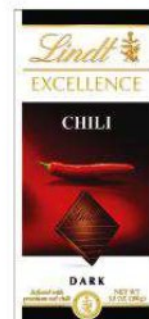


Ripe pear, honeysuckle and spring flowers make Riesling famously aromatic. With the light saltiness

of the bittersweet Lindt Excellence A Touch of Sea Salt, it's a sophisticated pairing.

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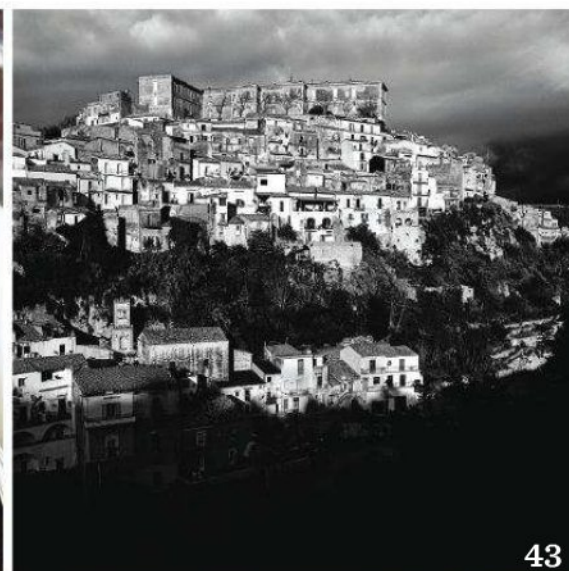
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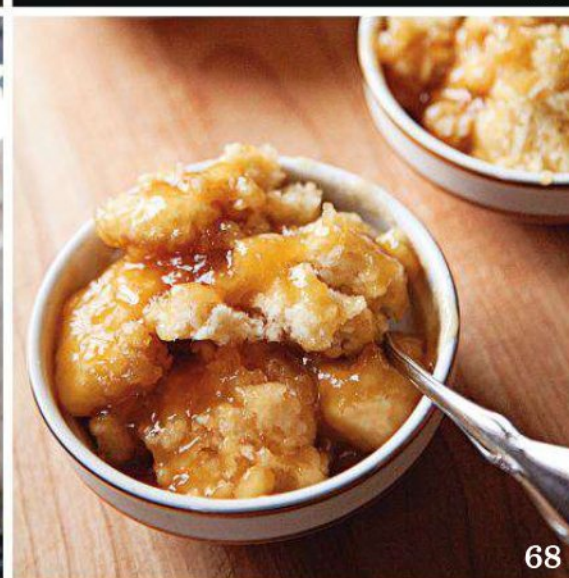
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Features

43 Soul of Sicily

The largest island in the Mediterranean lays claim to one of Italy's most dynamic cuisines. In this special feature, we explore Sicily's astonishing springtime bounty, its soulful home cooking, its East-meets-West pastries, and its Eastertime food traditions. Plus, we offer classic recipes, time-honored techniques, and a guide to local wines. *By Nancy Harmon Jenkins, Dana Bowen, Roberta Corradin, and Nick Malgieri*

68 The Sweet Life

The production of maple syrup, Canada's most beloved food, is a living tradition in rural Quebec. Inside the sugar shacks and at home, cooks use the ingredient in everything from pancakes and puddings to smoky beans and sweet-glazed hams. *By Sasha Chapman*

82 The Light of Morning

The Ideal Bar Restaurant in Gros-Morne, Haiti, is a window into the challenges of life in that small island nation, and its joys—not the least of which are delicious dishes like snapper in a fiery broth and garlicky stewed chicken. *By Jocelyn C. Zuckerman*

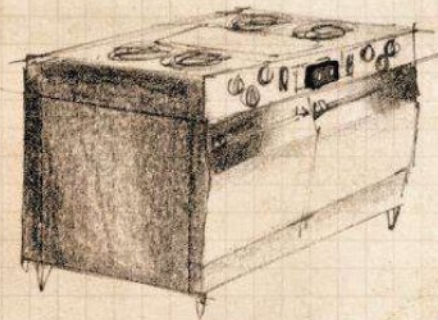
Cover *Sicilian Roast Leg of Lamb with Potatoes.* PHOTOGRAPH BY TODD COLEMAN

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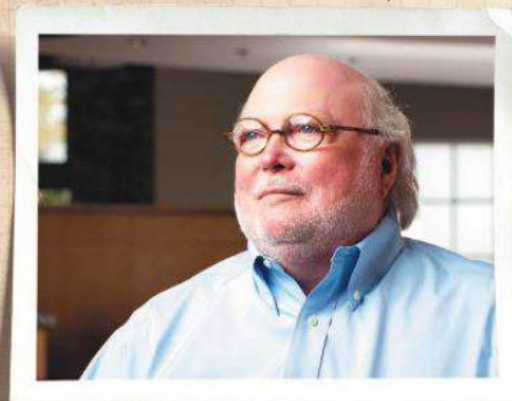
In 1982, Fred Carl started looking for a manufacturing partner with the highest standards. Five years later he found himself.



When Fred Carl dreamed up a professional-style range for the home, it seemed like an easy idea to bring to market. He criss-crossed the country, sharing his schematic drawings with commercial range manufacturers. Their universal response: "Why would anyone want a range like that?" And "why would we build it?"



They just didn't get it. Fred came to the conclusion he'd just have to build it himself in his hometown - Greenwood, Mississippi. So Fred and two employees tore down his prototype, and Viking manufacturing was born. As Fred's business grew, he insisted that manufacturing remain in Greenwood rather than contract production outside the USA.



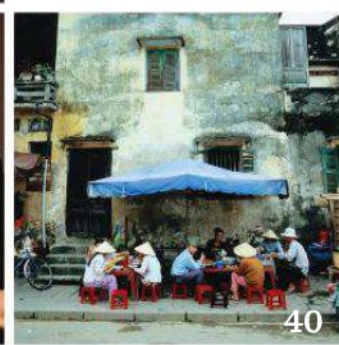
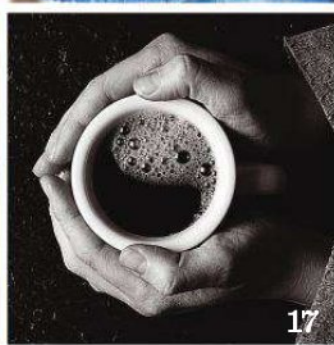
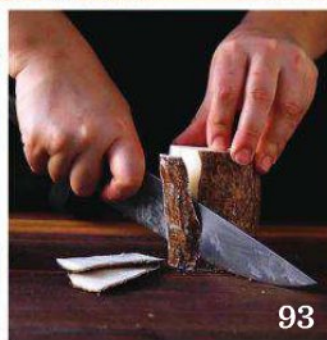
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Pictured left: the original Viking range - the world's first professional range for the home - and Fred's original drawings.



Departments

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A return to Italy's Sicily is perfectly timed to coincide with the traditional Easter feast.
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Hard at work in a Haitian kitchen. *Photograph by Ramin Talaie*

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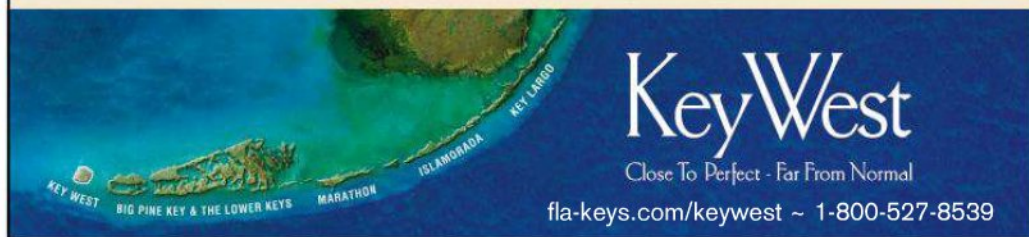
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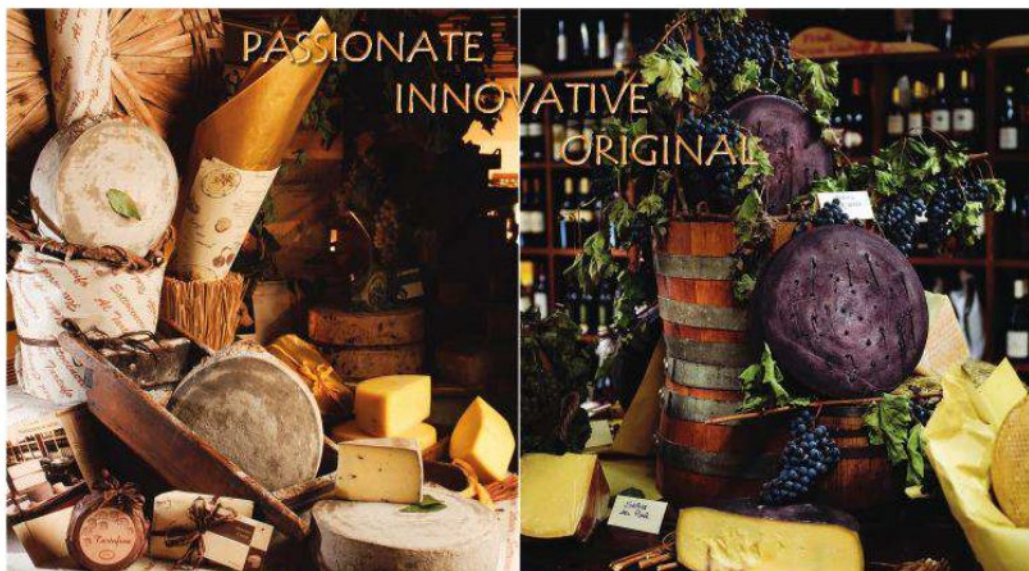
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photo by André Baranowski

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FIRST

Fantasy Island

Sicily is everything we love about Italy—times ten

I'LL NEVER FORGET my first taste of Sicily: a scoop of pale green gelato that tasted like pure pistachios. I was 22 years old and had been backpacking around Italy with my boyfriend, Lindsay; we'd decided to go to Catania, where my grandmother was born, to see if I could track down some relatives. That ice cream, which, to my surprise, came in a soft, sweet brioche, was my first clue that things were different there. Soon I realized that Sicily seemed to magnify everything I loved about Italy: the pristine landscapes, the ancient cities, the beautiful foods.

We'd heard that Sicilians could be cold to foreigners, a legacy of the Mafia's grip on the place (which is waning), but we found the opposite to be true. In Lipari, our hotel manager took us to see some Easter processions, then introduced us to the island's signature dish: pasta with wild fennel and sardines. In Palermo, a college kid gave us a tour of snack foods and the fish market. One night, in Siracusa, we walked into a restaurant to find a private party of soccer players and city officials, who invited us to join them. As we consumed an incredible array of fish with copious amounts of wine, our new friends took turns singing Sicilian folk songs and making toasts to one another.

One night, there was a knock on our hotel door. Two police officers told us to come with them; they had our passports and some questions about our overextended stay. We were terrified: Were they going to send us home? Ban us from this place forever? But after we explained—the search for family, the marvelous discoveries, the food!—the conversation ended in cheek kisses, and we were granted another two-month stay.

I've been scheming to get back to Sicily ever since. We finally did, last spring, to produce

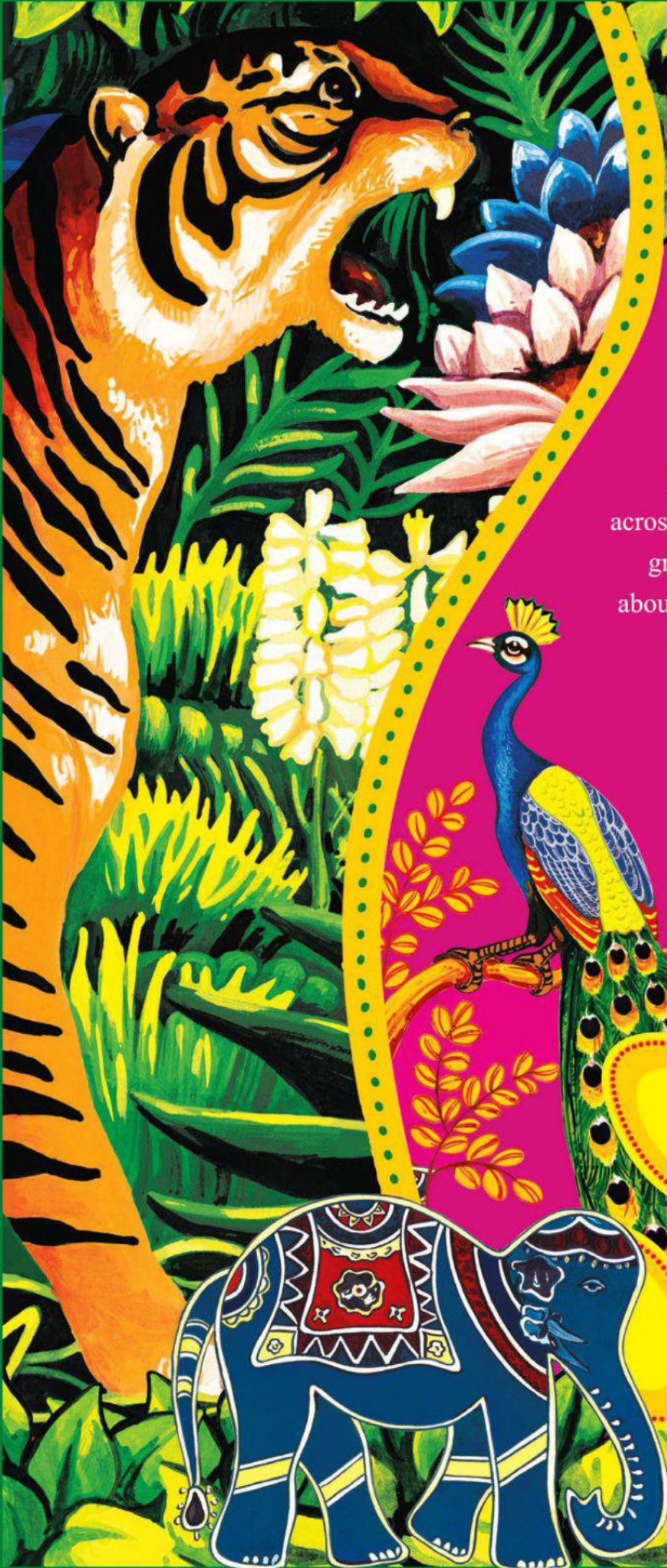
Nancy Harmon Jenkins's story about the island's superb home cooks. This time Lindsay (now my husband) and I were with our five-year-old son, Jack, and SAVEUR photographer Landon Nordeman, both of whom fell for Sicily as hard as we had all those years ago. And we found that people were as generous as ever. Giovanna Giglio Cascone, an outstand-



Clockwise from top left: Lindsay Bowen with Fabrizia Lanza; author Dana Bowen (standing, third from right) with the Giglio Cascone family; Jack Bowen in Palermo.

ing home cook in Ragusa, invited us for Easter lunch and taught us how to make dozens of traditional dishes. And Fabrizia Lanza, an amazing cooking teacher and an extraordinarily beautiful woman, welcomed us at her estate in central Sicily. On our last day, she cooked a casual lunch: wild porcupine braised in a hearty tomato sauce. It was delicious, and just the sort of thing we never would have experienced without the help of a friend. —DANA BOWEN, Executive Editor

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FARE

Destinations and Innovations from the World of Food, plus Agenda and More



Where There's Smoke

Some coffee roasters are all fired up over wood

TWO YEARS AGO, a pal returned from Tuscany with a bag of wood-roasted coffee beans, which, when brewed, yielded some of the most interesting coffee I'd ever tasted: toasty, silky, and with a black-cherry fruitiness. The beans, which came from Caffè Maraviglia, a roaster near Lucca, weren't available in the States, but once I started searching, I found that a few U.S. roasters were using wood. Though this traditional fuel lost traction to gas at the turn of the 20th century, there are delicious benefits to wood's rediscovery. "Wood adds a new dimension, a sweetness," says Todd Millar of Millar's Wood Roasted Coffee in Yacolt, Washington. Inside his roaster, fire licks the rotating drum that holds the beans, infusing them with smoke from different types of wood: tart maple, earthy cherrywood, sweet apple. But smoke is only part of the story, says Matt Bolindar, who operates Matt's Wood Roasted Organic Coffee in Pownal, Maine. He prefers wood for its drier heat, which clarifies the beans' natural flavors (Frangelico, apricots, tomato) in a way that gas heat doesn't. The result is a coffee break like no other. —Michelle Maisto

TODD COLEMAN (6)

Wood-Fire Roasted's Ethiopia Yrgacheffe

(\$14 per pound)
melds smoothness, a bright acidity, and a satisfying umami quality like that of buttered toast, all derived from roasting over sweet oak.



Millar's Sunset

(\$14.95 per pound)
is a smooth, medium coffee, with a touch of acidity and hints of blond caramel, infused with smoke from a mix of woods harvested from fallen trees on the roaster's property.



Mr. Espresso's Organic Bolivia

beans, roasted medium-well over an all-oak fire, are sumptuously dark and glossy, with hints of cocoa, toasted almonds, and toasted coconut (\$9.40 for 12 ounces).



Summermoon's Inferno

a Central American blend, gets an intense French roast in a mesquite-burning brick oven. Licorice-dark, the beans evoke campfire smoke, blistered pizza crust, and unsweetened chocolate (\$12 per pound).



Matt's Ethiopia Amaro Gayo Natural

beans (\$11.75 for 12 ounces) remain in the fruit while they dry, and then are roasted over sap and fruitwoods from the surrounding Maine forest, resulting in warm, round flavors: hazelnut, chocolate, and toasted baguette. —M.M.

AGENDA

March 2011

4

VENERDÌ GNOCCOLARO

(Gnocchi Friday)
Verona, Italy



In Verona, the last Friday of Carnevale is known as Gnocchi Friday. As legend has it, the celebration dates back to a 16th-century famine

that moved a wealthy doctor to donate flour, which was used to make boiled potato-and-flour dumplings that fed the entire city. An elected Father Gnocchi presides over the day's parade with a giant fork for a scepter. Revelers dig into regional specialties, including beef and veal *ragù*, *pastissada* (polenta pie), and the namesake dish. Info: carnevaldiverona.it.

5

Birthday:

MOMOFUKU ANDO

In 1958 in Osaka, Japan, Momofuku Ando, the then-penniless founder of Nissan Foods Product Company, invented instant ramen noodles.



Ando's creation, basically soup-infused dehydrated noodles to be mixed with hot water, resulted in a meal that takes only three minutes to prepare. Ando, who was born on this day 101 years

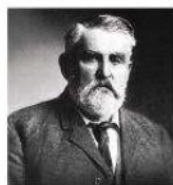
ago, passed away in 2007, but sales of Nissan's Top Ramen and Instant Cup soups continue to top \$3 billion annually.

5

Birthday:

CHARLES GOODNIGHT

Born in 1836, Texas rancher Charles Goodnight blazed many trails, including a few in the kitchen. In 1866, after



recognizing a need to make mealtime easier for fellow wranglers on the go, Goodnight outfitted an old Army-surplus wagon with a compartment of

kitchen shelves and drawers called a chuck box, along with a water barrel, a coffee grinder, and sling to carry kindling. The chuck wagon was born. Iterations of Goodnight's innovation are used on cattle drives to this day.

7

KATHARI DEFTERA

(Clean Monday)

Throughout Greece

Greek Orthodox Christians observe the first day of Lent by forgoing meat, certain fish, poultry, eggs, and dairy »

KING OF MARDI GRAS

I first tasted king cake at a Mardi Gras party in my fifth-grade classroom in Mississippi. Striated with cinnamon-sugar and cream cheese, and glazed with a sticky icing, my slice included a surprise: a small plastic baby. King cakes, which commemorate the Epiphany—the wise men's discovery of the baby Jesus—are eaten the world over in various forms, but they're nowhere more beloved than in New Orleans, where the cake is associated with the festivities of Mardi Gras, which run from mid-February through March 8 this year. Introduced by French settlers in the 1600s, New Orleans's traditional cake is sweetened, yeasted bread stuffed with a filling (cinnamon and cream cheese, say, or praline), shaped into an oval ring, topped with white icing, and garnished with purple, green, and gold sanding sugars. A figurine, which some say symbolizes the infant Jesus, is hidden inside; whoever gets the trinket is named king. The title comes with strings attached: it obligates its bearer to buy the cake for the next party. —Ben Mims

New Orleanians are passionate about their king cakes. Variations on the Mardi Gras-season treat are made all over town. Below, some of our favorites.



This modern cake (above), filled with apples and tangy goat cheese and decorated à la Jackson Pollock, is from Cake Café and Bakery.



The Vietnamese-American shop Dong Phuong Oriental Bakery slices its king cake and reshapes the slices into an oval, which is then covered with cream cheese icing (above).

For this less-common version from Hi-Do Bakery (left), a plain cake is simply sprinkled with colored sugars.



A simple confectioners' sugar icing, decorated with sanding sugars, makes this version, from Gambino's, the classic New Orleans king cake (above).



The bakery Sucré makes this small, moist, eggy brioche bun (above), gilded in a thin purple-and-gold glaze.

Almond cream encased in puff pastry and topped with a paper crown (below) defines La Boulangerie bakery's French-style cake, called galette des Rois. —B.M.



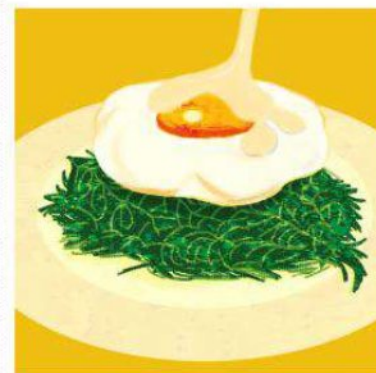
Just Ask

Mystery Cracked

Behind the clever guises of a beloved breakfast dish

Eggs Florentine recipes vary so much that the only constant seems to be the spinach. Which recipe is the original one? —Pam Schmidt-Curren, San Lorenzo, California

Why the French, who coined the phrase *à la Florentine*, associated spinach with Florence is not fully known, though some say the style of dish was named for the birthplace of Catherine de Médicis, who introduced the leafy green into Gallic cuisine with her mar-



riage to France's Prince Henry in 1533. Dishes prepared *à la Florentine* almost always include spinach and are often topped with a *mornay*—or cheese—sauce. Most early recipes for eggs Florentine simply paired those ingredients with poached or baked eggs. Later versions strayed from that formula. Some recipes called for hard-boiling the eggs, others for scrambling them. Yet others interpreted the dish in an altogether different manner. In his 1898 cookbook, *Eggs, and How to Use Them*, Adolphe Meyer, chef at Manhattan's exclusive Union Club, went so far as to describe "eggs Florentine" as eggs dressed in a chicken and mushroom cream sauce poured over not spinach but the bottoms of artichokes, another food introduced by Catherine de Médicis. —Bryce T Bauer

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: © RUPERT SAGAR/MUSGRAVE/ALAMY; TODD COLEMAN (6); © THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NYC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED; © MICHAEL NEELON (MISC)/ALAMY. ILLUSTRATION: BEPPE GIACOBBE/MORGAN GAYNIN

» products. Instead, they feast on grilled octopus, shrimp in a lemon-olive oil sauce, *lagana* (unleavened bread) served with *taramosalata* (cod roe spread), and more. Activities such as picnicking, kite flying, and housecleaning also mark this national holiday. Info: visitgreece.gr; 30/2/108-707-000.

8

PACZKI DAY

Hamtramck, Michigan

This Michigan city's Polish community celebrates Fat Tuesday by deep-frying thousands of *paczki*, Polish jelly doughnuts. Also called *Bismarcks*, the *paczki* are made from eggy dough stuffed with prune, raspberry, and other fruit fillings, traditional rosebud marmalade, or custard. They can be glazed or sprinkled with powdered sugar or orange zest. A parade and a *paczki*-eating contest round out the festivities, with the winner earning the esteemed *paczki* cup. Info: hamtramck.us.



25

Birthday:

DANIEL BOULUD

The owner of fine-dining restaurants, brasseries, and bistros in New York, Palm Beach, Miami, Vancouver, Beijing, London, and Singapore, Daniel Boulud was born in 1955 in St-Pierre-de-Chandieu, France, near the gastronomic capital of Lyon. A childhood spent on his family's farm left Boulud with an appreciation of fresh, seasonal ingredients. As a young man,



he apprenticed for top French chefs, including Roger Vergé, Georges Blanc, and Michel Guérard. Boulud arrived in the States in 1982; 11 years

later, he opened the eponymous French dining room, Daniel, one of Manhattan's most acclaimed restaurants.

25

VÄFFELDAGEN

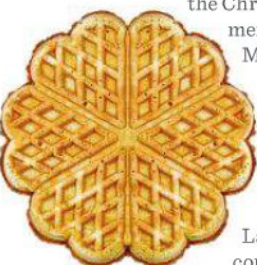
(Waffle Day)

Throughout Sweden

Swedes eat heart-shaped waffles topped with whipped cream and jam made from cloudberry (blackberries' tangy cousin) for breakfast, lunch, and dinner to celebrate the Annunciation, the Christian feast day commemorating the Virgin

Mary's revelation that she was with child.

Some say *våffla*, the Swedish word for waffle, stems from one of Mary's monikers, Var Fru, or Our Lady. Info: visitSweden.com; 212/885-9700.



Chef's Special

A Good Heart

The edible core of palm trees proves to be a versatile food

I'VE EATEN THE canned version of hearts of palm—the innermost core or growing bud of certain varieties of palm tree—in salads, puréed in soups, and straight from the can with a dollop of Russian dressing. I've liked their mild tang and creamy centers, but my familiarity with the ingredient wasn't complete until recently when, helping a friend on a cookbook project, I watched chef Harold Dieterle in his kitchen at New York's Perilla add fresh hearts of palm to a salad of baby red oak lettuce, Manchego cheese, and toasted macadamia nut dressing. Tasting a raw palm heart opened up a new world for me. Harvested from Hawaii's peach palm, a variety that sprouts up to 40 separate shoots that can be cut without killing the tree, the ivory-colored

Chef Julian Medina of New York City's Yerba Buena restaurant with his hearts of palm fries

stalk was remarkably crisp, with a mild, woodsy flavor.

It turns out that Dieterle's not alone in his love for the ingredient; eaten in tropical and subtropical regions—in Philippine spring rolls, Argentine tarts, Brazilian empanadas—fresh palm hearts appear to be having a peak moment among chefs. I've found them roasted and puréed with sour cream to make a bed for foie gras at Adour in Manhattan; shaved over hog snapper carpaccio at Miami's AltaMare; and even mimicking pasta in a carbonara at São Paulo's celebrated D.O.M. restaurant. But my favorite way to eat fresh palm hearts is to swap them for the canned ones in a recipe I got from Julian Medina, of Manhattan's pan-Latin restaurant Yerba Buena. Medina breads the hearts in panko, deep-fries them, and serves them with a chipotle dipping sauce (see a recipe at right). I could eat baskets of them. —Tyla Fowler

Reading Palms

Hearts of palm, harvested from the trees' cores, are widely available canned or jarred in water and citric acid, which preserves their ivory hue and lends the soft-centered cylinders a mild tang. They're great in salads, soups, savory tarts, or deep-fried for snacks. Fresh palm hearts are harder to find—they have only a two-week shelf life—but they can be ordered from producers in Hawaii. With their nutty flavor and crunchy texture, they're fantastic shaved atop a salad or a fish dish, deep-fried, or roasted. —T.F.

Hearts of Palm Fries with Chipotle Mayo

Serves 4–6

These addictive fries, served at Yerba Buena restaurant on New York City's Lower East Side, can be made with fresh hearts of palm for a crispier texture.

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 2 chipotle chiles in adobo, minced
- 1 tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 1 tsp. honey
- 1 tsp. soy sauce
- ½ tsp. sesame oil
- Canola oil, for frying
- 4 cups panko bread crumbs
- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 4 eggs
- 2 28-oz. cans hearts of palm, large pieces halved lengthwise
- Kosher salt to taste

1. In a medium bowl, whisk together mayonnaise, chiles, lime juice, honey, soy sauce, and sesame oil; set chipotle mayo aside.

2. Pour oil into a 6-qt. Dutch oven to a depth of 2" and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 375°. Meanwhile, place bread crumbs and flour on 2 separate shallow plates and set both aside. Whisk together buttermilk and eggs in a medium bowl; set aside. Working in batches, toss hearts of palm in flour until evenly coated, shaking off excess, and then dredge in egg mixture. Place in bread crumbs and toss to coat. Fry, turning occasionally, until golden brown and crisp, 2–3 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain and season with salt. Serve warm with chipotle mayo.



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Oak Tree Road, Iselin, N.J.

The Garden State boasts the country's most delicious South Asian strip

Home to one of America's largest South Asian communities, Central New Jersey is a cornucopia of saris, samosas, and garam masala. Oak Tree Road, a colorful, chaotic stretch of restaurants and shops linking the towns of Edison and Iselin, is the area's throbbing heart. But don't expect the usual kebab-and-curry fare. Here, India is represented in all its culinary complexity, from the sweet *farsan* (snacks) of Gujarat to the spicy street food of Mumbai and the meaty entrées of Chettinad. —*Riddhi Shah*



Chowpatty

1349 Oak Tree Road
(732/283-9020;
chowpattyfoods.com)
Named after Mumbai's popular beachfront, this place for western Indian street food makes a delicious *dabeli* (spiced potatoes and pomegranate in pan-fried bread; shown, above) and a famed *chikoo* (a sweet fruit) milk shake.

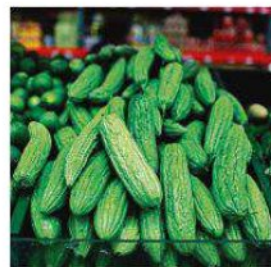


Jhupdi

1679 Oak Tree Road
(732/906-2121;
jhupdirestaurant.com)
The all-inclusive Kathiawadi thali—*puran poli* (wheat bread stuffed with sweet lentils) or *choorma ladoo* (whole wheat flour and jaggery balls), lentils, vegetables and other sides, and desserts—will introduce you to the sweet and savory heat of the cooking of Gujarat's northern regions.

Karaikudi Chettinad

1671 Oak Tree Road
(732/516-0020;
karaikudiusa.com)
This American outpost of an Indian chain serves the fiery foods of southeastern Chettinad. Graze at the impressive buffet, or if you're ordering à la carte, try the chicken *chettinad* (spicy chicken in tomato and shallot sauce) or *meen kuzhambu* (fish in tangy tamarind sauce).



Shalimar

1335 Oak Tree Road
(732/283-3350)
This Pakistani-owned storefront is a carnivore's respite on a vegetarian-dominated street. Try the saffron-scented chicken or goat *biriyani*, minced *seekh kebab* (shown, right), or whatever catches your eye from the display case.



sweet alphonso mango and other seasonal fruit.

Subzi Mandi

1518B Oak Tree Road
(732-/603-0588;
subzimandidallas.com)
Its name means "vegetable market," and this outlet of a U.S. grocery chain is indeed the place to find little-known veggies like mild-flavored *doodhi* (long squash) and *karela* (bitter melon, shown at left), plus

Sukhadia's Sweets

1507 Oak Tree Road
(908/222-0069)
Stop into this shop for Gujarati snacks and sweets like *khandvi* (spiced yogurt and chickpea-flour rolls), *jalebi* (fried-dough spirals soaked in honey syrup; shown, far left), and *dhokla* (steamed lentil or chickpea-flour cakes).

EASTERN SPIRIT

For a Scotch lover like me, the idea of a "Scotch" that comes not from Speyside but from Japan takes some getting used to. The truth is, though they can't technically be called Scotch unless produced in Scotland, Japanese "scotch style" whiskeys have been made for 87 years—with some noteworthy differences. Suntory, Japan's pre-eminent spirits maker (and the only one who imports whiskeys to the U.S.), ages its whiskeys in Spanish sherry and American white oak casks, as well as barrels made of *mizunara*, a rare Japanese oak that imparts an aroma akin to sandalwood. When I sample a dram of Suntory's **Yamazaki Single Malt 12-Year-Old Whisky** (\$43), that herbaceous scent mingles with the aroma of honeyed vanilla. The result is a unique and nuanced drink. Both the 12-year-old and the **Yamazaki Single Malt 18-Year-Old Whisky** (\$120) are as hearty, rich, and smoky as those from Scotland's Speyside, but—in part because of that native oak—I find them even more intriguing. With notes of black cherry, white pepper, and fragrant wood, the round, subtle 12-year-old is a great foil for sushi. The complex 18-year-old tastes of brown butter and wet earth, with a dry, languid finish. Try it with beef or chocolate. A portion of **Suntory's Hibiki 12-Year-Old Blended Whisky** (\$65), a grain-and-malt blend of 30 different whiskeys including Yamazaki, is aged in old *umeshu* (plum brandy) casks for a flavor redolent of stone fruit. Creamy and mellow with a clean, sweet finish, this easy-drinking whiskey pairs well with almost any food. —*Marne Setton*



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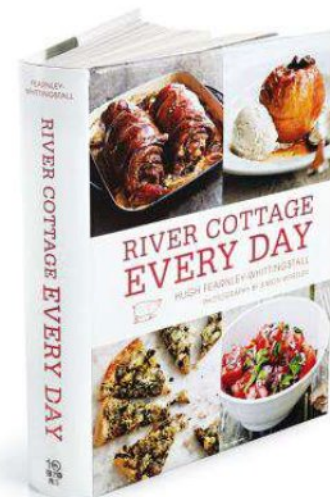
Clear Choice

I've never been a vodka drinker. Distilled multiple times and typically filtered, the colorless spirit is also fairly odorless and tasteless. So when [SAVEUR.COM](http://saveur.com) asked me to do a tasting of new American vodkas, I wasn't expecting a thrill. I should have known better; inspired by local food movements, craft distilling is exploding in the U.S. Along with American whiskeys and other spirits, distillers are creating all sorts of artisanal vodkas. At Manhattan's French Culinary Institute, where I run the beverage program, we sampled about 30 vodkas. I was struck by their diversity. There were vodkas made with grapes, blue corn, maple sap—local ingredients that spoke of where they'd been distilled. Then I was floored by the flavors: creamy, citrusy, spicy. I started mixing. I blended cider and celery bitters with a vodka from Oregon's Organic Nation; I added buttery Vermont Gold Vodka to a Kahlua and cream; and I used a clean, peppery vodka from Georgia's 13th Colony Distillers in this riff on one of James Bond's favorite drinks. ✿ *Hibiscus Rose Vesper* Combine 3 oz. dry gin (such as Tanqueray), 1 oz. vodka (preferably Plantation), ½ oz. Lillet Blanc, and three dashes hibiscus rose bitters in a cocktail shaker, add ice, and cover. Shake until chilled, and then strain into a chilled martini glass. Makes one cocktail. —*Alexis Kahn*



For more drinks made with craft American vodka, one of the spirits in the hibiscus rose vesper (shown), visit our website, [SAVEUR.COM](http://saveur.com), where you'll find over 15 years of [SAVEUR](http://saveur.com)-tested cocktail recipes.

TODD COLEMAN (3)



Book Review

Home Truths

An author of books for serious cooks pens a crowd-pleaser

THE PAST FEW years have delivered a library's worth of "quick-easy-thrifty" cookbooks. Global economic crisis will do that, and from Britain, where pulling your socks up in the face of austerity is a matter of patriotic pride, we have new books in this vein by Jamie Oliver (*Jamie's 30-Minute Meals*; Michael Joseph Ltd.), Nigella Lawson (*Nigella Kitchen: Recipes from the Heart of the Home*; Hyperion), and even the late Elizabeth David (*At Elizabeth David's Table: Her Very Best Everyday Recipes*; Ecco). A surprising one is *River Cottage Every Day*, an accessible collection of recipes from the farmer-cook Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, out this month in an American edition from Ten Speed Press.

Compare, for instance, Fearnley-Whittingstall's *River Cottage Meat Book* (Ten Speed Press, 2007), which opens with a photo essay depicting the slaughter, skinning, and sawing in half of a cow. The message: if you don't take the matter of where your food comes from seriously, this book isn't for you. *River Cottage Every Day*, by contrast, begins with a photo of the author scarfing honey-smeared bread and an introduction in which he confesses that as a child he refused to eat anything that

“didn’t come out of a Birds Eye package and get fried up and served with ketchup.” He’s saying that though he may have a posh last name, he understands how people really eat.

Still, he never misses an opportunity to remind readers that using the best ingredients is a matter of moral gravity. A recipe for kippers with smashed new potatoes begins, “Kippers are an honorable part of the proud fish-smoking tradition we have in the UK. If you choose properly smoked ones without dyes or artificial flavorings, I think you’ll find this a wonderfully satisfying dish.” And so it is: a smoky, parsley-flecked hash brightened with a last-minute squeeze of lemon juice. It’s that sort of grace note that makes these recipes so appealing. Simple lentil soup becomes genuinely exciting with the addition of toasted caraway seeds and minted yogurt, while a lunch box (there’s a chapter on these) assem-



bled from leftover roast beef and lentils is pulled together with a gutsy mustard dressing. Fearnley-Whittingstall is, at heart, a philosopher, and these new recipes make a case for approaching daily cooking with intention—or, as he puts it, finding “things to savor and share that don’t just fill us up, but make us feel good.”

—Beth Kracklauer

THE PANTRY, page 100: More about purchasing wood-roasted coffee, king cake, and palm hearts.

Lentil Soup with Caraway and Minted Yogurt

Serves 6

This Indian-inspired dish, from a recipe in *River Cottage Everyday* by author Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall (Ten Speed Press, 2011), flavors lentils with caraway and coriander to make a quick, fragrant soup.

- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 2 medium yellow onions, roughly chopped
- 1 carrot, roughly chopped
- 2 tsp. coriander seeds, toasted and finely ground
- 1 tsp. caraway seeds, toasted and finely ground
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 6 cups vegetable stock
- 1½ cups red lentils, rinsed and drained
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 5 tbsp. Greek yogurt
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped fresh mint

Toasted flat bread or pita, for serving

1. Heat oil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Add onions and carrots and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 10 minutes. Add coriander, caraway, and garlic and cook, stirring often, until fragrant, 1–2 minutes. Add stock and lentils and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, cover with a lid, and cook, stirring occasionally, until lentils are soft, 15–20 minutes.

2. Transfer soup to a food processor or blender and, working in batches, purée until smooth. Return soup to the pot and keep warm over low heat. Season with salt and pepper.

3. To garnish, stir together yogurt and some of the mint in a bowl; set aside for 10 minutes to marry flavors. Divide soup between 6 bowls, top with a dollop of the yogurt, and sprinkle with the remaining mint. Serve soup with flat bread.

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Taking Root

It's time cassava claimed its place on the American table

BY DOROTHY IRWIN

A CASSAVA IS AN ugly-beautiful thing. Formidable. For years I saw the gnarly brown root vegetable at different markets in New York City, where I live, and I'll confess I was a little intimidated. Surely it would take some special tool, one I didn't have in my kitchen, to remove the bark-like peel, which, on most cassavas I've seen, has been coated in a disconcerting layer of wax.

I was fascinated to discover that I'd actually been eating this vegetable all my life, in the form of tapioca—the pure starch filtered out of juice extracted from the cassava, and further processed into a fine powder, coarser granules, or the round pearls found in tapioca pudding. The gap between the pearls in the pudding I'd grown up with and the vegetable I saw at the market seemed too vast to comprehend. So, I decided to connect the dots by cooking.

First I determined what cassava is, exactly: a starchy, tuberous root native to Central and South America, typically sold at a size of six to ten inches in length and two to three

inches in diameter. I'd seen it referred to as yuca and manioc, and I learned that its many other aliases—*aipim*, *mandioca*, and *macaxeira* in Brazil alone; *mihogo* in Swahili-speaking Africa; *kappa* in South India; *singkong* in parts of Indonesia—reflect its distribution across a vast portion of the globe. The plant that produces the tuber, *Manihot esculenta*, is a woody shrub that grows quickly and vigorously—a sort of miracle plant, really. In tropical conditions with natural rainfall, it requires no irrigation, and its roots can be harvested year-round; unharvested, they can remain underground for an astonishing three years without spoiling. For all those reasons, cassava is ubiquitous throughout the tropics and a staple food for, by some estimates, 15 percent of the world's population.

The cookbook *Tasting Brazil* (Macmillan, 1992), by the historian Jessica B. Harris, provided me a richer picture in its recipes and descriptions of the many ways that cassava is used in Brazil—one of the homelands of cassava and therefore, I reasoned, as good a place to start as any. Take *farinha de mandioca*, a coarse meal made from cassava that's been soaked, dried, ground, pressed, and (sometimes) toasted. Brazilian cooks further toast this cassava meal in butter or palm oil to make *farofa*, a crunchy condiment found on tables throughout Brazil. On the country's northeastern coast, there is also *vatapá*, a creamy, polenta-like dish of coconut milk and palm oil

thickened with *farinha de mandioca* and studded with shrimp, fish, or chicken. In the same region, fresh cassava is boiled and mashed, shaped into fritters around a filling of spiced ground beef, and deep-fried to make *bolinhos de macaxeira recheado*. Farther south, Brazilians use two kinds of powdered tapioca starch—a sour, fermented kind called *polvilho azedo*, and an unfermented kind, *polvilho doce*—to make a *gougère*-like pastry, *pão de queijo*, enriched with grated hard cheese. In *Tasting Brazil*, Harris notes that cassava even “turns up batter-fried in São Paulo's Japanese tempuras.”

As I collected recipes from other parts of the world, I learned that cassava has been a staple crop in some places for thousands of years—though its distant history is somewhat difficult to trace. Four years ago, Payson Sheets, an anthropology professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder, led the excavation of a field of cultivated cassava at the ancient Maya village Cerén, in El Salvador. He called the finding “a jackpot” because it revealed, as no other ancient site has, what the Maya ate besides corn, beans, and squash—all of which require fertile soil and are sensitive to drought. Those more finicky crops figured in Maya religious practices—and the artifacts associated with them—while dependable cassava was used strictly as food; the evidence was consumed,

A farmer with a newly harvested cassava crop in Betioky, Madagascar.

© JEREMY HORNER/ALAMY



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and so cassava has remained largely invisible to history. “I like to think of cassava as an old Chevy gathering dust in the garage,” Sheets said. “It doesn’t get much attention but starts right up every time when the need arises.”

IN MY OWN KITCHEN, I embraced cassava in stages. *Farinha de mandioca* was, for me, the gateway cassava: already processed and ready to add to all kinds of dishes. After finding a bag in Manhattan’s Little Brazil, I couldn’t wait to make *farofa* at home. The cassava meal, similar in texture to cornmeal, was labeled *torrada*, which means it had already been lightly toasted. To begin I simply melted butter in a cast-iron skillet, lightly sautéed some diced onion, then added a handful of *farinha de mandioca* and cooked it, stirring constantly, for just a couple of minutes, until it took on a pale brown color and a lovely, nutty flavor. I served it as one of the garnishes for a big pot of *feijoada*, the hearty Brazilian black bean and pork stew, along with wilted collard greens, orange segments, and white rice. The final flourish, a showering of *farofa* over top, added to the dish a wonderful crunchy texture.

Now I was eager to cook with the tuber itself, though one fact I learned did give me a moment of pause: in its pulled-from-the-ground state, cassava is actually poisonous. Like bitter almonds and raw bamboo shoots, raw cassava contains hydrogen cyanide, a colorless, toxic gas. I was assured, however, by written sources and produce vendors alike, that it took nothing more than cooking it until tender to dissipate the gas and make the vegetable completely safe for eating. In any case, two kinds of cassava grow in the tropics: the bitter, more toxic kind, and the sweet kind, which contains very little of the toxin, concentrated in the peel. In New York City, or anywhere else in North America, I would find only sweet cassava for sale. And even the toxin in bitter cassava is easily extracted by soaking, grinding, pounding, or just cooking the root thoroughly.

I started with frozen cassava, which has the advantage over the fresh vegetable of coming already peeled. In the supermarket freezer case I found a bag of three whole roots, peeled and pristine. At home I used a butcher’s knife to cut one of the frozen roots into smaller hunks, added it to a pot of water, and let the cassava simmer on the stovetop for about 30 minutes, until it was very tender. Drenched in a Cuban-style *mojo* made with bitter orange juice, lime juice, cilantro, and crushed garlic, the starchy, silky cassava offset the sharpness of the raw garlic and citrus beautifully.

I loved the subtle, nutty flavor of both the

cassava meal and the vegetable itself, but what I came to appreciate above all was the way that cassava in its various forms makes it possible to modulate texture in a dish. There was the crunchy aspect of *farinha de mandioca*, and then there was the viscosity—a distinctive velvety plushness—that the starch from the vegetable could bring to a soup or stew. I wanted to explore that further, and so I overcame my trepidation and brought one of those knobbly, bark-covered fresh cassavas home to my kitchen. Based on advice I found in the book *Uncommon Fruits and Vegetables* (William Morrow, 1998) by the produce expert Elizabeth Schneider, I was careful to select one with no soft or dark spots, no creasing or withering. This one was, like many of those I’d seen, covered in wax; apparently the root that keeps for years underground doesn’t hold up nearly as well once it’s been picked and so requires a little protection. But in the end, both skin and wax were easily removed with an ordinary vegetable peeler. It was on the smaller side—about eight inches long, roughly the size of a big sweet potato—and when I sliced it lengthwise to remove the woody core I’d been told I’d find running down the center, there was actually very little to cut away.

In the *African Cooking* volume of the wonderful *Time-Life Foods of the World* series (Time Life, Inc.; 1970), I’d found a recipe that sounded irresistible, for an East African beef and cassava stew called *muhogo tamu*. I began by chopping the peeled cassava, which I boiled for a half hour and then set aside to drain. I browned some cubed boneless chuck in a Dutch oven and then removed the meat and added onions and turmeric to the flavorful fat in the pot. Once the onions had softened I put the beef back in, added some fresh tomatoes and water, and left the whole thing to simmer for an hour. Near the end of cooking, I added coconut milk, chopped jalapeños, and fresh cilantro. The cassava went in last of all. It absorbed some of the rich coconut milk, and, just as I’d hoped, it released some of its starch into the casserole, giving it body and a luscious consistency. And its mild, creamy flavor was the perfect foil for the fiery chiles. Delicious. With each forkful, I quietly thanked the ancient cooks who first cracked the code of this potentially perilous but endlessly rewarding food. 🐘

Clockwise from top left: eggs and scallions with toasted cassava flour; pork, beef, and chicken soup; cassava custard; tapioca pudding; Brazilian cheese bread; cassava with garlic and citrus. (See page 30 for recipes.)





Bibingka

(Cassava Custard)

Serves 12

In this dessert from the Philippines, grated cassava and coconut milk make a rich custard, best served warm with coffee or tea.

- 1½ cups sugar
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- 2 eggs
- 1 14-oz. can coconut milk
- 1½ lbs. peeled cassava (fresh or frozen), cut into large chunks
- ⅓ cup heavy cream

Heat oven to 350°. In a bowl, whisk sugar, butter, salt, eggs, and coconut milk until smooth. Process cassava in a food processor until finely shredded. Whisk cassava into egg mixture. Pour into a 9" x 13" baking dish; bake until just set, about 40 minutes. Using a brush, quickly brush cream evenly over custard; continue baking until browned, about 40 minutes more. Let cool for 15 minutes.

Farofa de Ovo e Cebolinha

(Eggs and Scallions with Toasted Cassava Flour)

Serves 4

Brazilians often toast cassava flour in butter to crisp it and deepen its color and flavor; sometimes they combine the resulting buttery farofa with eggs and onions, too. This recipe is based on one in Leticia Moreinos Schwartz's *The Brazilian Kitchen* (Kyle Books, 2010).

- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- ½ cup cassava flour
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 4 scallions, thinly sliced
- 5 eggs, lightly beaten
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Heat butter in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-low heat. Add cassava flour and cook, stirring often, until lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Transfer flour to a small bowl and set aside.

2. Heat oil in a 10" nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add 3 scallions and cook, stirring, until soft, about 5 minutes. Add eggs and cook, stirring, until soft and creamy, about 2–3 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in half the toasted flour; season with salt and pepper. Divide between 4 plates; sprinkle with remaining toasted flour and scallions.

Pão de Queijo

(Brazilian Cheese Bread)

Makes 16 rolls

If you can't find sour tapioca starch, sweet tapioca starch will yield equally delicious results.

- 1 cup sour tapioca starch (see page 100)
- 1 cup finely grated Parmesan

- ½ cup plus 2 tbsp. flour
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. active dry yeast
- ¾ cup milk
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed
- 2 eggs

Heat oven to 350°. In a large bowl, whisk together tapioca starch, Parmesan, flour, salt, and yeast. Heat milk and butter in a small saucepan over medium-high heat until butter melts. Pour mixture into dry ingredients along with 1 egg and stir until dough forms; cover and let sit for 30 minutes. Using a tablespoon, portion out dough and roll each into a ball. Place on parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced 2" apart; beat remaining egg in a small bowl and brush balls with egg. Bake until browned, 25–30 minutes.

Puchero

(Pork, Beef, and Chicken Soup)

Serves 12

This recipe for a hearty soup made with cassava, beef, chicken, and pork is based on one in *Secrets of Colombian Cooking* by Patricia McCausland-Gallo (Hippocrene, 2004).

- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- ¾ cup thinly sliced scallions, plus 3 whole
- ½ cup peeled and chopped tomatoes
- 3¼ tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper, plus more to taste
- ¼ tsp. ground cumin
- ¼ tsp. saffron
- 3 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 6 tbsp. minced cilantro, plus 5 sprigs
- 1½ lbs. pork spareribs, cut into riblets
- 1 lb. beef brisket, cut into 2" cubes
- 1 3–4-lb. chicken
- 2 lbs. cassava, peeled and cut into 2" pieces
- 2 lbs. medium potatoes, peeled, quartered
- ½ small head cabbage, thinly sliced
- 3 avocados, peeled, pitted, and quartered, for serving
- Cooked white rice, for serving

1. Heat oil in an 8" skillet over medium heat. Add sliced scallions, tomatoes, ¼ tsp. salt, pepper, cumin, saffron, and 2 cloves garlic; cook, stirring often, until soft, about 5 minutes. Add 2 tbsp. minced cilantro, reduce heat to low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until very soft, 20 minutes. Transfer to a small bowl and set aside.

2. Place remaining salt and garlic, whole scallions and cilantro sprigs, spareribs, brisket, and chicken in a 12-qt. pot and cover with water by 1". Bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook until chicken is cooked through, about 1 hour and 15 minutes.

3. Remove chicken, cut into 10 serving pieces, and discard skin and carcass. Place chicken on a plate, cover, and set aside. Add cassava and potatoes to pot and cook for 10 minutes. Add cabbage, cover loosely, and cook until vegetables

are tender, 20–25 minutes. Return chicken to pot, stir in reserved scallion–tomato sauce, and season with salt and pepper; cook for 5 minutes. Ladle stew into large serving bowls and sprinkle with remaining minced cilantro. Serve with avocado and rice on the side.

Tapioca Pudding

Serves 8

Meringue adds lightness and body to this classic tapioca pudding.

- 4 cups milk
- ½ cup large pearl tapioca
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 vanilla bean, seeds scraped and reserved
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 cup sugar
- 4 eggs, separated
- Ground cinnamon, to garnish

Bring milk, tapioca, salt, and vanilla seeds to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat; reduce heat to medium-low and cook, stirring, until tapioca is tender, 25–30 minutes. Whisk together cream, ¾ cup sugar, and egg yolks in a medium bowl. Whisking constantly, add egg yolk mixture to tapioca; cook, stirring, until mixture thickens and just begins to boil, 8–10 minutes. Remove from heat and transfer to a large bowl; let cool to room temperature. Meanwhile, whisk egg whites until frothy. While whisking, sprinkle in remaining sugar; whip to stiff peaks. Fold whites into pudding and divide between 8 bowls; chill. Sprinkle with cinnamon.

Yuca con Mojo

(Cassava with Garlic and Citrus)

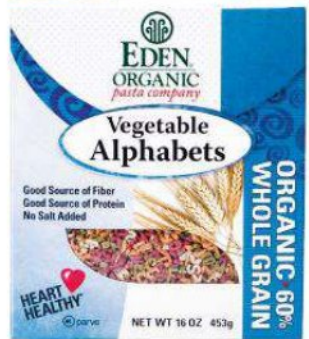
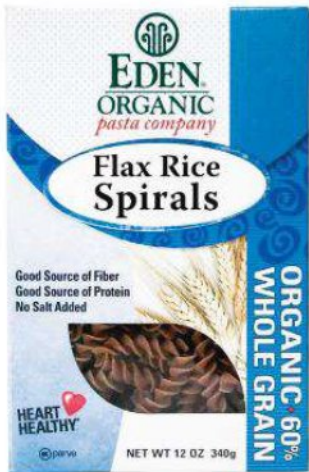
Serves 4–6

Starchy cassava, boiled until tender and brightened with a citrusy marinade, makes a great side dish for grilled or roasted meats. For step-by-step instructions on how to peel and cut cassava, see page 96.

- 3 lbs. cassava, peeled
- Kosher salt, to taste
- ½ cup olive oil
- 16 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- ¾ cup sour orange or lime juice
- 2 tbsp. roughly chopped oregano
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Cut cassava into 3" lengths, then lengthwise into 6 sections; using a knife, cut away inner core of each. Place cassava in a 4-qt. saucepan and cover with cold water; season with salt and bring to a boil. Cook until cassava is tender, 8–10 minutes. Drain and set aside.

2. While cassava is cooking, make sauce: Heat oil in a small saucepan over medium heat; add garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until garlic is fragrant and sizzling but not browned, 3–4 minutes. Transfer to a bowl; whisk in juice and oregano; add cassava, season with salt and pepper, and toss. Let sit for 10 minutes to marry flavors.



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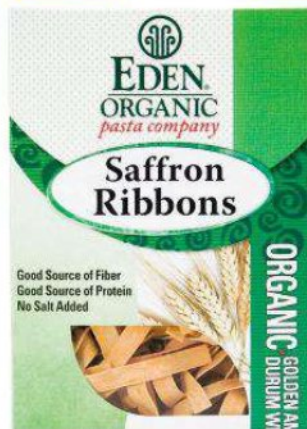
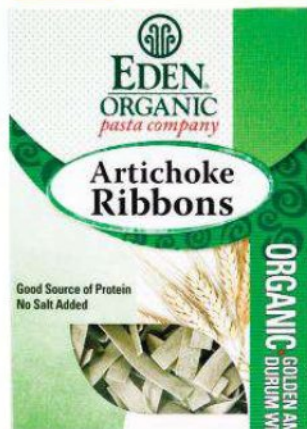
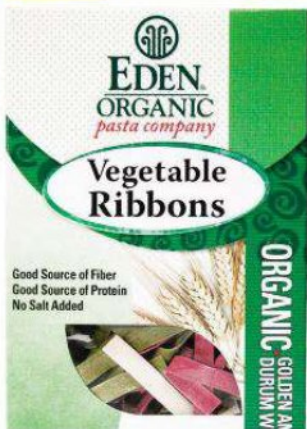
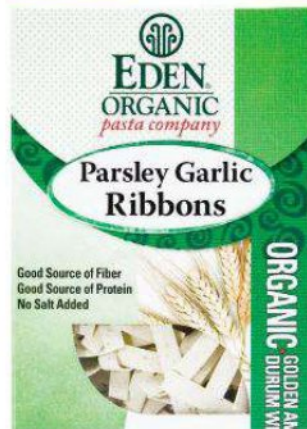
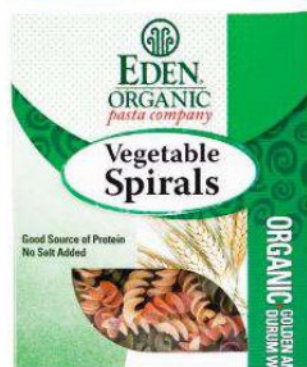
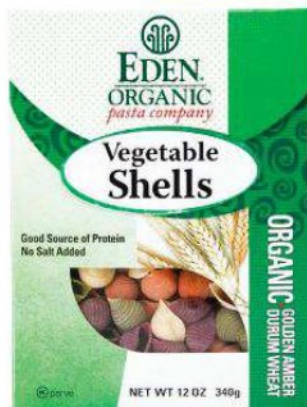
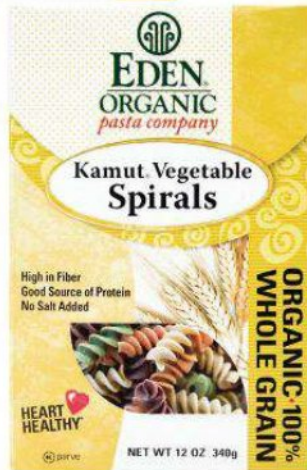
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SOURCE

Dairy Queen

Meet the love child of yogurt and cream

BY KAREN SHIMIZU

WHEN I travel to a foreign city, one of my favorite things to do is explore the dairy section of a local grocery store. What I discover is often an educational, and delicious, microcosm of that country's cuisine. When in the Republic of Georgia, I found full-bodied yogurt flavored with rose-petal jam. In Turkey, I ate *kaymak*, a luscious cousin to clotted cream. I was startled, though, back at home, to come across dairy products as novel—and delectable—as anything I've encountered overseas.

At White Cow Dairy, a tiny farm about 25 miles south of Buffalo, New York, owner Patrick Lango transforms the milk from his 30 cattle into some of the best dairy products I've ever tasted. The fourth-generation farmer makes a variety of milk-based delights, from traditional items, such as butter, to quirky electrolyte-packed whey "sports drinks." But it's his cultured creams—luxurious cream-based yogurts—that are the most special. Made by adding a starter

culture to heavy cream, the cultured cream has luscious milk-fat body and just enough tang to cut the richness. Though it comes in several flavors, like tart rhubarb or mellow pumpkin, the version called *crème bulgare* (the French term for cultured creams), which includes a touch of Meyer lemon juice and raw honey, is my favorite: lightly sweet and mildly acidic, it's wonderful with berries, granola, spooned over pound cake, or eaten straight out of the jar.

Lango insists there's nothing extraordinary in his cooking process—"But," he says, "I am using fantastic milk." Lango's herd grazes on a mix of plants (burdock, chamomile, and peppermint, to name a few) that gives the milk its complex flavor. The dairy kitchen stands less than eight yards from the barn, and Lango begins creating his foods within moments of milking. "We observe the universal law of cooking," he says. "Great ingredients make great food." To order *crème bulgare* (\$5 for a five-ounce jar), e-mail White Cow Dairy at orderfresh@aol.com.

MICHAEL KRAUS

Architect of Flavor

The colorful cuisine of Stephanie Izard's Girl & the Goat

BY DANA BOWEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY BETH ROONEY

STEPHANIE IZARD'S PIZZA DOESN'T TASTE like any pizza I've had before, not with its cool drizzle of yogurt and julienne of rapini greens. In fact, in shape and spirit, it's more like *lahmajun*, the Turkish flat bread—only Izard's, which is slathered with a spicy masala sauce, comes with caramelized *cipolline* onions and tender pieces of smoked goat. It's crisp in all the right places and piping hot with gooey cheddar, Gouda, and *tomme*-style cheeses. And it goes against everything I thought I knew about good pizza.

That dish epitomizes what makes Izard's Girl & the Goat—the Chicago restaurant she opened last July, two years after winning the fourth season of Bravo's *Top Chef*—such an interesting place. I first tried it a few months ago, when I went to Chicago specifically to eat. The plan was to revisit a few restaurants I hadn't been to in years—like Cafe Spiaggia (Tony Mantuano's less-formal offshoot of Spiaggia), which still turns out some of the city's best pastas—and to check out several newer places I hadn't been to yet, like Paul Kahan's Midwestern gastro pub, Publican (a pork lover's dream, with the likes of homemade charcuterie, *boudin blanc*, and ham chops). These were good meals. Solid meals. But Girl & the Goat was something else entirely.

I'd never watched Izard on *Top Chef*; nor had I eaten at her previous restaurant, the 60-seat Scylla in Chicago's Bucktown neighborhood, which closed in 2007. When I looked at Girl & the Goat's menu online, it seemed to hopscotch around the globe: much of it was Mediterranean inspired (*pappardelle*, ravioli), but the ingredients were all over the place (satsuma orange, sea beans) and a sizable number of them played into the nose-to-tail trend of the day. There'd been a lot of hype leading up to the restaurant's opening, and I had to wonder whether Izard could really pull off a menu like that one. Still, I went with an open mind.

The space, for starters, is impressive—huge, really, with soaring ceilings and a scattering of polished wood tables that make the place feel more like a party venue than a restaurant. You step inside and get sucked right into a convivial vibe. Johnny Cash is playing on the sound system one minute, '80s New Wave music the next, and the bar that lines one side of the room is packed a few people deep. We hovered around the communal bar table on our first trip and landed four spots, next to a family from the suburbs and a couple of food bloggers from Texas

who photographed everything they ate. "Try a fry!" one of the bloggers said, and we did—even my sister, who is not a person known for eating off strangers' plates. They were incredible: crisp and salty, with a meaty sprinkle of something over top (Izard's dehydrated powdered ham, I later learned). Dipped into two sauces—a smoky tomato aioli and an insanely delicious cheddar-beer sauce—the batch we ordered went down easily with a hoppy Three Floyds Alpha King, one of the excellent local beers Izard keeps on tap.

This was going to be fun, I could tell already. But there were hints all around that The Goat, as Chicagoans have taken to calling it, is a very serious restaurant. Take, for example, the bustling open kitchen; staffed with more than a dozen cooks, it stretches across the entire back wall, the centerpiece of which is a blazing wood-burning oven that fills the restaurant with a bonfire aroma and imparts a smoky flavor to many of its dishes. And there is Izard—a petite 34-year-old in a neat chef's coat with her hair pulled back—expediting on the line, walking plates out to tables, and very often stopping to sign autographs and pose for pictures

Even more impressive than the fact that Izard is able to balance all the flavors and textures on her plates is that she's dreamed them up at all

with *Top Chef* fans. You can see why her clients adore her; she exudes a warm, girl-next-door friendliness. She seems to be doing everything in her power to make sure you're having a good time.

We ordered more than half the menu that first night; it's a small-plates menu, so you can do that, right? Not really. These aren't the kind of noshy, elemental small plates you find at wine bars: each of the 30-plus menu items—which are broken down into the categories Vegetables, Fish, and Meat—is a fully realized dish.

The vegetables we started out with exemplified Izard's moxie. Blistered pan-fried *shishito* peppers, earthy with miso vinaigrette, arrived under a blanket of bubbling hot Parmesan cheese and sesame seeds—an absolute umami bomb. There were sautéed green beans, verdant and crisp, tossed with a fish-sauce vinaigrette and a sprinkle of cashew nuts;



The goat masala pizza at Girl & the Goat restaurant in Chicago.



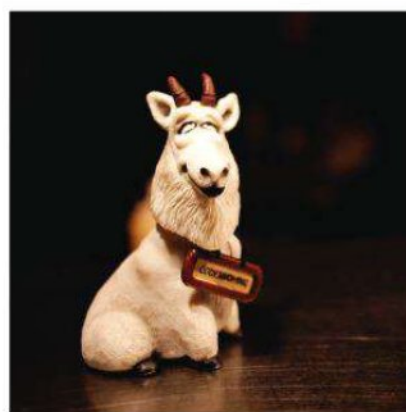
and a sweet potato gratin, with blue cheese and crispy onions, that tasted like the world's best casserole. (I wasn't surprised to learn that Izard has worked for Chicago's Shawn McClain, chef-owner of the creative vegetarian-centric restaurant Green Zebra.)

When the chickpea fritters came, atop a salad of both raw and crisp-fried garbanzos, goat feta, hazelnut hummus, and nutty *romesco* sauce, I started to understand why Izard's food is alluring: she brings the complexity and care you expect to find at higher-end restaurants down to earth. The food is unpretentious, but nothing about it is dumbed down. It's complicated, with layers of flavor and bold pairings that reach around the world but are never fussy or forced. Even more impressive than the fact that she's able to keep her dishes so balanced is that she's dreamed them up at all. Shiitake gelato with chocolate cake? Cauliflower with pickled peppers and mint? How does that happen?

Now, some plates are indeed small; I wanted more than the four fried oysters, each one served with a dollop of egg salad and a salty, crisp-fried caper on top. And the two perfectly seared scallops, their sweetness played up with pumpkin *brandade*, pomegranate, and fried Brussels sprouts, were so good we ordered another round. But other items could feed a small family, like the roasted lamb shank that comes on a wood board with homemade pita bread and a slew of garnishes: a curried aioli and pickled grapes, crispy onions, and a garlicky feta spread.

It's with all these little extras that Izard wins you over. Take the breads: each night, baker Greg Wade offers three kinds, and they arrive soft and warm in whole loaf form with their own specially designed butters and spreads. My tablemates and I devoured an entire "Squish Squash" *boule*—fragrant with acorn squash and served with quince jam and soft maple-walnut butter—in about two minutes.

There are lots of dishes on Izard's menu that speak to the offal-



Clockwise from top left: Pemaquid fried oysters with egg salad and fried capers; Girl & the Goat's dining room; its mascot; chef Stephanie Izard samples a loaf of housemade bread.

loving, whole-hog spirit of the day—her *hiramasa* (amberjack) crudo is dotted with pork belly; her ribs come with a pig's-ear slaw. But Izard doesn't revel in

the meatiness of these ingredients so much as use them to make a point and counterpoint. Take her "wood-oven-roasted pig face," which has emerged as a signature: two scrapple-like patties made from seasoned head meat, served with a fried egg, crunchy potato sticks, and bright sauces like tamarind vinaigrette and cilantro oil. When you eat it, you're less in hog country than you are at an Indian street stall.

And then there's all that goat. It's on that pizza, in a homemade sausage, and it forms the base of a delicious slow-cooked *sugo*, sweetened with gooseberries and rosemary and tossed with homemade *pappardelle*. When I asked Izard how she'd come to embrace—and name the restaurant after—that ingredient, she explained that the *izard* is a breed of Pyrenees goat, and that she'd never cooked with it before opening the restaurant. She started reading up on the meat and became fascinated with the myriad ways that cooks in other cultures used it. Now she buys it from a local farm and goes through seven whole goats each week.

It's that passionate curiosity, combined with her spot-on instincts and real kitchen chops, that makes Izard's cooking feel so fresh and expansive, and so entirely her own. After a few visits I got the sense that Izard was minting a new form, one that integrated truly global influences with a real omnivore's creativity. At the same time, there was something inherently Midwestern and friendly about the food, with its more-is-more philosophy and comfort-food appeal. I found myself craving the restaurant once I got back home to New York, and wishing that there were someplace here more like it. 🐐

GIRL & THE GOAT 809 West Randolph Street, Chicago (312/492-6262; girlandthegoat.com). Hours: Sunday–Thursday 4:30–11:00 P.M.; Friday–Saturday 4:30–midnight. Plates \$4–\$26; desserts \$6.



FLAVORS *of* FLANDERS

For such a small region, Flanders is chock full of fabulous flavors. Located in the north of Belgium, bordering the North Sea, the region boasts the freshest seafood as well as more hearty dishes made with chicken, meat or game.

A RICH HISTORY. Flanders flourished during the late Middle Ages thanks to its innovative fine textile industry, which made trading cities such as Ypres, Ghent and Bruges wealthy, powerful and richly ornamented with art and architecture. Today, these and other cities have kept their heritage and added another layer: the art of food.

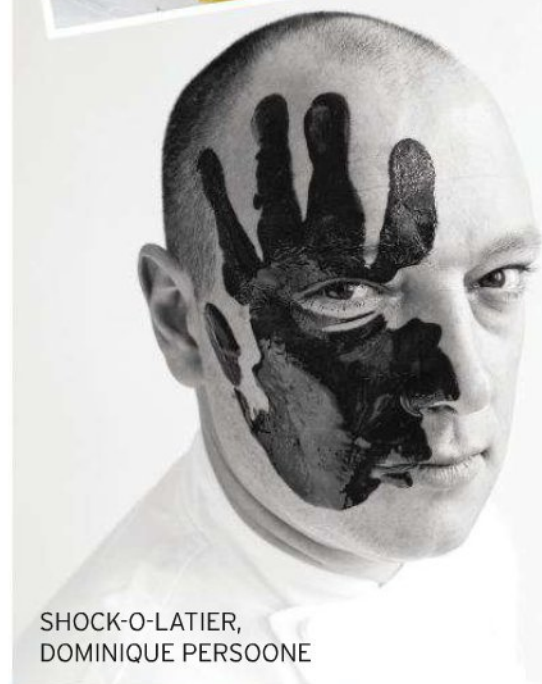
ROBUST TRADITIONAL FARE. First stop: iconic Belgian fries, best enjoyed on the street, straight from the paper cone and dipped in mayonnaise. Also renowned are crevettes grises, the highly prized **North Sea gray shrimp** that show up in croquettes, stuffed in a tomato or as appetizers on the cocktail menu. For heartier traditional fare, Carbonnade à la Flamande, a beef stew simmered in beer. On the side: **white asparagus**, a seasonal delicacy served with a delicious buttery parsley sauce mixed with hard-boiled egg. For a more contemporary take on Flemish food try Belga Queen, with two brasseries in landmark buildings in Brussels and Ghent. Leave your wine list at the door: Here, beer is the beverage of choice, with more than **800 types of beers**, many artisanal, from sweet brews like **Belgian Raspberry** or **Cherry Lambic** to more full bodied such as **Westmalle**. Enjoy them on their own or with delicate dishes, hearty fare or cheese.

CUTTING-EDGE CUISINE. **Hoppas (hops + tapas)** is the latest expression of beer and food pairing in Flanders. The small-plate dining trend matches two great gastronomic traditions: certified regional and local food and artisan brews. The “bites” are paired with beers according to style, weight and

flavor intensity—light beers with lite bites, powerful beers with savory roasts or other toothsome meals. What to try? A caramelized beer like Pauwel Kwak with braised veal cheeks and white beans or a sweet Petrus Golden Tripel with fried skate wing and golden turnip puree.

As proof of what's old is new again, Dominique Persoone, founder of the Michelin-recommended shop, **The Chocolate Line**, has turned Flanders' coveted sweet stuff into a true gastronomic experience. The chef-turned-confectioner refers to himself as a “Shock-o-latier”—with creations such as a multi-sensory “cocoa shooter kit” (The Rolling Stones are cocoa “sniffers”). He runs a veritable chocolate laboratory experimenting with peppers, wasabi, garlic—even oysters.

Persoone is one of the Flemish Primitives, a think tank of innovative chefs who are pushing the parameters of Belgian gastronomy. They take their name from the 15th century interdisciplinary artists movement, which changed the art mindset in Western Europe. Today's “Primitives” hope to do the same.



SHOCK-O-LATIER,
DOMINIQUE PERSOONE

2011 CULINARY CALENDAR

On March 14, **The Flemish Primitives** will attract some 1,500 gourmands to Ostend for demonstrations, master classes and walk-around tastings in this international showcase of food innovations. The event was sold out last year: book early!

www.theflemishprimitives.com

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ESSAY



Adrià's Second Act

What's next for the world's most influential chef?

BY ANNE WILLAN

IN MORE THAN 40 YEARS OF WRITING about food, I have never had an interview as spirited as this. I am sitting opposite Ferran Adrià, arguably the most famous—and most provocative—chef in the world, at the restaurant El Bulli, where he's cooked for 26 years, in the seaside village of Roses, Spain. We are communicating in fractured French, mine rusty from disuse, his overlaid with the rough consonants of Catalan, his mother tongue. I am here because I'm fascinated by Adrià's cuisine, often called “molecular gastronomy,” a term that refers to the chemical and physical processes behind cooking but is far too narrow to describe his sweeping vision. And I'm wondering what Adrià, who is 48 years old, plans to do next.

“Is it true you are closing El Bulli?” I ask.

“No, no!” he exclaims. “Our new plans will be a beginning, not an end.” El Bulli's last meal will be served on July 31 of this year, but after that, he explains, the space will be used for his new educational foundation, which the Spanish telecom giant Telefónica is helping to fund. It will be a gathering place for the culinary world—not just cooks but

sommeliers, front-of-house professionals, writers, and, eventually, diners—to experiment with foods and the ideas they spark. It will be far more think tank than culinary academy, Adrià adds; at the end of each day, participants will go online to discuss their experiences with the wider world. “It's all about sharing, about letting the mind take flight,” he says.

And thus begins a soaring overview of what matters most to Ferran Adrià: “Progress, freedom from rules. We will be testing our participants' creativity. I want them to question basic assumptions.” I, by contrast, am a traditionalist, firmly convinced that a great recipe cooked by a master will always add up to more than the sum of its ingredients. That's why in 1975 I founded La Varenne cooking school, in Paris, where cooks from all over the world come to learn the methods of classical French cuisine. I still maintain you must learn the scales to play the music, and as proof I point to the fact that Adrià worked his way up in traditional kitchens, under chefs trained in classical Spanish cooking. “I learned the basics when I started out,” Adrià tells me. “And I assume that all the cooks in my kitchen have done the same.”

Ferran Adrià was born in 1962 in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, the

ANNE WILLAN is the founder of the famed La Varenne cooking school. This is her first article for *SAVEUR*.

ILLUSTRATION: PAUL BLOW/ANNA GOODSON

second-largest city in Catalonia. He dropped out of school at 18 and started as a dishwasher at a traditional restaurant south of Barcelona. In 1983, he landed a position through a friend at El Bulli, an upscale restaurant on the Costa Brava, and when its French chef left seven months later, Adrià and another cook stepped up to the job. By the time he and El Bulli's manager, Juli Soler, had scraped together enough funds to buy the restaurant in 1990, Adrià was gaining attention for his creative cooking: he'd spent time working in the kitchens of the restaurants Georges Blanc and Maison Pic in France and was inspired by nouvelle cuisine, local ingredients, and the idea of doing something entirely new.

It was Adrià who pioneered the froths and foams that nowadays often take the place of traditional sauces; he is famous for his "caviar," droplets of intense flavors like oyster liquor and fruit juice that have been sealed in a membrane with sodium alginate and calcium chloride. He seems to like to laugh at food. I take food seriously, probably too seriously. Then why, if we come from opposite ends of the culinary spectrum, do I find his cooking so compelling? One reason is the science. In some ways, I see his approach as the extension of fundamental cooking techniques; they're chemical reactions that alter, and improve, the taste of food. In others, it's pure innovation.

Another quality of Adrià's that intrigues me is his fervent multinationalism, from the cooking, to the ingredients, to the cooks at El Bulli, who hail from 15 different countries. On this visit—my third to the restaurant in ten years—I'm impressed by how Adrià has moved from his early exploration of novel techniques to the creation of a truly global cuisine. Glancing over the 37-course menu, I recognize hints not just of the surrounding countryside of Catalonia, France, and Spain but also of South America, Japan, the United States. "Everywhere the sky is blue," he races on, "there are a multitude of cuisines and dishes. I think of them as the languages and dialects of food."

DINNER IS ABOUT TO BEGIN. In the 52-seat dining room, our scene is set simply with a white tablecloth and rectangular white plates. We start with an evocation of cocktails: stalks of sugarcane infused with mojito and caipirinha, which we suck lustily. As dinner progresses, I note how often we are asked to play with our food, whether it's to crack a "pond" of ice with a spoon before drinking the sweet, mint-flavored water beneath with a straw, or to pick up an olive that collapses into a rich and puckery liquid essence of olive once it hits the tongue.

You might fear that a succession of 30-plus courses would lead to boredom, or even overkill, but Adrià is a master of communication, pacing, and suspense. Dishes hold inner meanings, and sometimes jokes. Every menu includes roses, a reference to the seaside town where the restaurant is located, Roses: this time, it's a flower formed of steamed rose petals dressed with an extract of artichoke, their dual fragrances filling the air.

The high point of dinner for me is an egg so large it seems to have been laid by an ostrich. When we crack the surface, it is totally empty inside. We break and nibble the shell, which turns out to be a creamy frozen extract of Gorgonzola cheese. How on earth, technically, was that achieved? Associations stream through my mind: Humpty Dumpty; collecting eggs in the farmyard as a child; gem-studded Fabergé eggs in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg; the birth of Superman. It can be no accident that Dalí, the surrealist painter, lived and worked less than 20 miles from this very spot.

Like Dalí, Adrià has a strong sense of theater. He is adept at the

feint (chocolate ravioli hides hare liver inside), the frontal attack (four plays on almonds, alternately salty, sweet, acidic, and oily), and the disguise ("caviar" made from hazelnuts). Though deconstructing dishes—pulling them apart, then rearranging them on the plate to evoke the original and challenge the senses—dates back to at least the 1930s and the Italian Futurist Filippo Marinetti, author of the 1932 book *The Futurist Cookbook* (in which he imagined meals where every person has the sensation of eating "not just good food, but also works of art"), no one does it like Adrià. Amid all the emotional triggers and cerebral essences, his food remains utterly delicious. Whether it's a toasty purée of peanuts ("Skippy for grown-ups," a fellow diner said) or a piece of ice sprinkled with green tea, you put it in your mouth and your eyes light up. Wow!

Nonetheless, not every dish at El Bulli is for everyone. I well remember, on a previous visit, the appalled expression of an English friend when presented with a Braque-like fish skeleton, crisply fried to be eaten with the fingers. My own particular horror was a quivering, rose-scented blob, a look-alike for a beached jellyfish. On this occasion, my son Simon's nose wrinkles when he tastes Parmesan ice cream with a hint of balsamic and a dried strawberry on the side. "I like my cheese plain," he protests.

Adrià is well aware of the challenges he sets his guests. He is not seeking approval but testing preconceived ideas. "There are many cultural prejudices," he says. "For instance, even though fresh fish is a regional staple, Catalans don't like sashimi." That said, he serves it all the same.

It can be no accident that Salvador Dalí, the groundbreaking surrealist painter, lived and worked less than 20 miles from Adrià's restaurant El Bulli

OF COURSE, THE REAL REASON I'M here to interview Adrià is that he's changing the way we eat. "Ferran Adrià is easily the most influential serious chef of the late 20th and early 21st centuries," writes Colman Andrews in his biography *Ferran: The Inside Story of El Bulli and the Man Who Reinvented Food* (Gotham Books, 2010). "Quite simply, he changed the game." Adrià's impact can be seen in all the experimental cooking going on in restaurants today. There are other luminaries driving this movement: Juan Mari Arzak, an early pioneer at Arzak in San Sebastian, Spain; Heston Blumenthal at the Fat Duck in Bray, near London; Grant Achatz at Alinea in Chicago; Wylie Dufresne at wd-50 in New York; José Andrés with Minibar in Washington, D.C., and The Bazaar in Los Angeles. But Adrià is the ringleader, and his new foundation—which plans for more collaboration, more books (Adrià has already published some 25), more multimedia—along with his new restaurant projects (like the cocktail bar 41° in the Parallel district of Barcelona, and a tapas bar next door called Tickets, which he runs with his brother, Albert) will continue to further his reach.

Our time runs out, and Adrià bounds to his feet. The next minute, he is apron-clad and back in the kitchen behind the worktable, spoon in hand, conferring with a sous-chef. I warm at once to the ambience of fresh-faced young people eager to learn, a reminder of my days at La Varenne. But here the atmosphere is far more intense, more idealistic.

I offer the chef my thanks and my congratulations on all he has achieved. He smiles humbly. "We are so lucky," he says to me. "Just to eat is a gift." 🐦

CLASSIC

Heaven in a Bowl

The original *pho* is a complex and subtle masterpiece

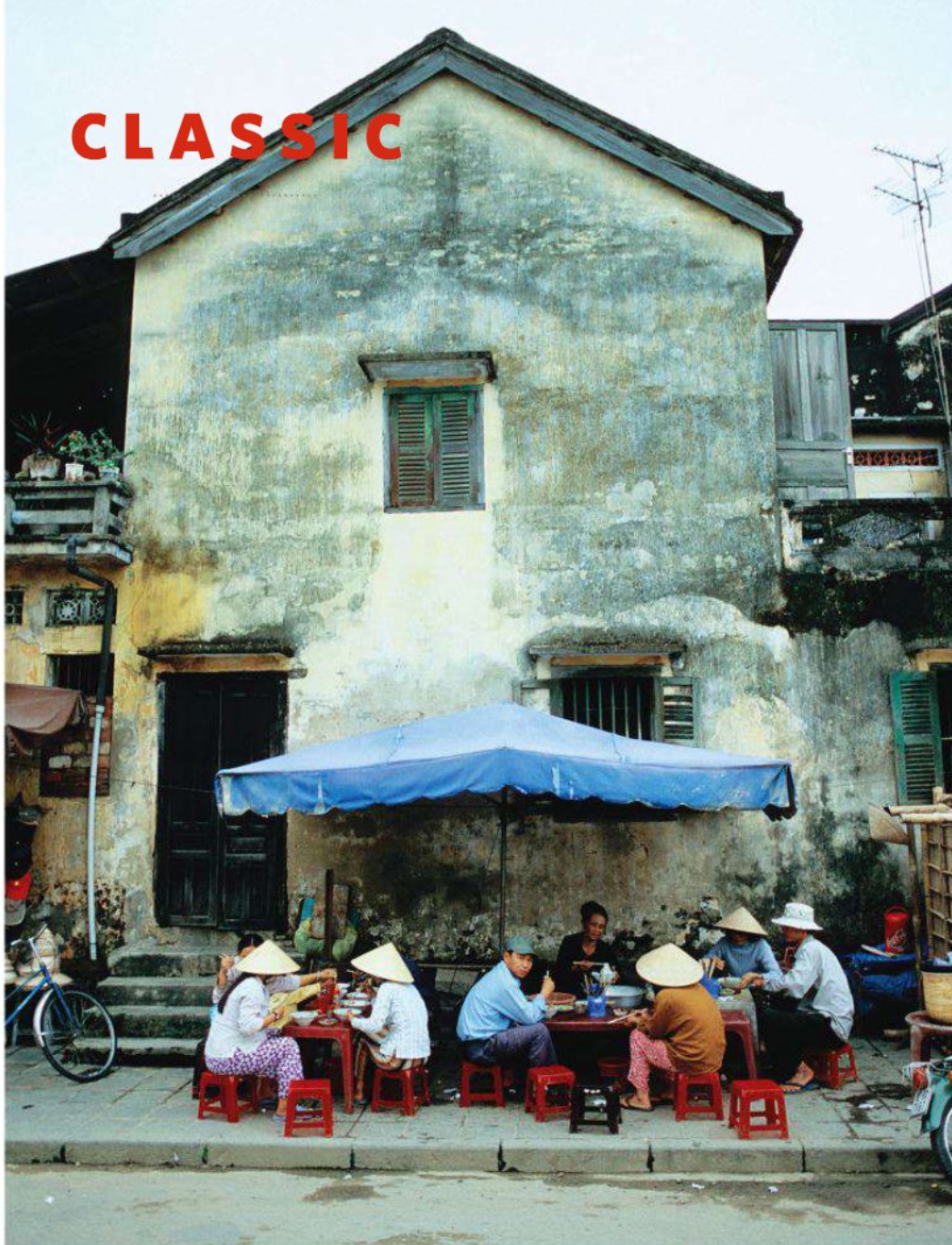
BY ANDREA NYUGEN

I'VE HAD A LIFELONG relationship with *pho* (pronounced fuh), the delicately spiced beef and rice-noodle soup that's practically the national dish of Vietnam. It first won me over in 1974, when I was five years old; my parents had brought me to their favorite *pho* joint in Saigon, and I apparently wielded my chopsticks and spoon like a pro, quickly emptying my bowl. From then on, I was hooked.

Pho joints are everywhere in Vietnam—hidden down small city alleyways, nestled between village storefronts, situated along dusty rural lanes. Yet when my family immigrated to Southern California in 1975, good *pho* was nowhere to be found, so my mother began making her own. She spoiled me with her homemade version, but I didn't fully understand her approach to this staple dish until I traveled back to its source.

In Vietnam, *pho* is mostly a breakfast food: the heady soup awakens your senses and prepares you for the day. Countless versions exist, but they all contain rice noodles and an aromatic broth seasoned with shallots, ginger, fish sauce, salt, and spices such as black cardamom, fennel, cassia, star anise, and cloves. Right before the broth is ladled into the bowl, the cook may add meat, onions, cilantro, scallions, and black pepper. The original *pho*, the style I grew up eating, first appeared around the late 19th century, in Nam Dinh province, southeast of Hanoi. It's a simple soup, reflecting the unfussiness of northern Vietnamese fare. My parents, born in northern Vietnam in the 1930s, recall that their *pho* contained nothing more than noodles, beef, and broth. The *pho bo* (beef *pho*) recipe in the classic Vietnam-

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Diners at a *pho* stall in Hoi An, Vietnam, a city on the country's central coast.

ese cookbook *Lam Bep Gioi* (Cooking Well), first published in 1944, echoes that simplicity; it calls for rice noodles, beef, scallions, fresh herbs, broth, and black pepper.

While no one is certain what "pho" means in Vietnamese, many believe it stems from France's pot-au-feu, a beef and vegetable stew. Some say that French colonialists, who occupied Vietnam from 1883 to 1954, slaughtered huge quantities of cattle to satisfy their appetite for beefsteak, and resourceful Vietnamese cooks used the scraps and bones to create *pho*. When the country was split into North and South Vietnam in 1954 under the Geneva Accords, northerners, migrating south to escape the Communists, brought their *pho* culture with them. South Vietnam was agriculturally and economically richer than North Vietnam, and southerners cooked with greater flourish. The southern Vietnamese version of

pho that emerged was supersized and included fanciful add-ons such as meatballs, tripe, and tendon as well as fresh herbs, sprouts, and bean sauces. The fall of Saigon in 1975 sent a wave of southern Vietnamese abroad, which explains why most *pho* shops outside of Vietnam offer the bodacious southern-style soup.

In our household, my mother felt these extras were distractions. "Adding those things ruins a good broth, the essence of *pho*," she said. I've made four trips back to Vietnam since 2003 and sampled *pho* from north to south. On my most recent trip, last summer, I finally understood what Mom meant: the best renditions I found were all *pho bac* in Hanoi.

Take the version at Pho Gia Truyen, which many say serves Hanoi's finest *pho*. I arrived at 6:30 in the morning at the unadorned storefront in the old quarter, where, as with many *pho* shops, there is a work station on the

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sidewalk manned by cooks. I found a stool between two locals and dived in. It was hot and humid outside, but the broth was restorative. I observed diners adding vinegar-soaked chiles to their bowls. I was surprised because I avoid putting lime juice in *pho*; it clouds the broth and dulls its nuance. However, the chiles brightened the dish without overwhelming it.

Later that morning, I noticed a *pho* vendor in the nearby market tossing a spoonful of MSG into each portion. When I later spoke to my cousin Le Thu Quyen, a Hanoi home cook, she told me that she prefers to use *sa sung* (dried sea worms) in place of MSG to naturally add savory sweetness to the broth.

The *pho* I ordered at the Spices Garden Restaurant, in the Sofitel Legend Metropole Hotel in Hanoi, was my favorite. The broth was clean and balanced. Chefs Nguyen Thanh Van and Nguyen Thi Kim Hai told me that they seasoned with salt while the soup was simmering and added fish sauce only at the end.

With this newfound knowledge, I returned home, determined to replicate what I'd tasted in Vietnam. For the broth and cooked beef, I simmered bones and meat from grass-fed cows, since those are closer to what's used in Vietnam. To the pot I added charred and peeled shallots and ginger, along with toasted spices, dried scallops to naturally mimic the effect of MSG (as my cousin does with *sa sung*), and salt. I strained the broth, then seasoned it with fish sauce, as the Spices Garden chefs had suggested. Wanting to serve it for breakfast, I refrigerated the broth and meat overnight. The next morning, while I reheated the broth, I sliced the beef and garnishes. I steeped chiles in rice vinegar for adding at the table, as they do at Pho Gia Truyen. Then I assembled a meal, softening the rice noodles in water before placing them in the bowl. I laid the beef on top, followed by onion, scallions, cilantro, and black pepper, and ladled the broth over top. The *pho* was the best I'd ever made—as always, I finished every last drop. 🍴



Pho Bac

(Northern Vietnamese-Style Beef and Rice-Noodle Soup)

Serves 8

This heady northern version of *pho* derives much of its richness from beef bones; author Andrea Nguyen prefers the flavorful leg bones from grass-fed cattle. This recipe is based on Nguyen's.

- 4 large shallots, unpeeled
- 1 4" piece ginger, unpeeled
- 1 tsp. fennel seeds
- 5 star anise
- 1 3" stick cinnamon
- 1 pod black cardamom, crushed
- 5 lbs. beef leg bones, cut into 2"–3" pieces
- 1½ lbs. boneless beef chuck, trimmed and cut into 4" x 2" x 1½"-thick pieces
- ½ oz. dried scallops
- 2 tbsp. kosher salt, plus more
- ¼ cup fish sauce
- 8 scallions, green parts thinly sliced, white parts left whole
- 1½ tbsp. unseasoned rice vinegar
- 2 serrano chiles, stemmed and thinly sliced crosswise
- 2 lbs. small flat rice noodles
- 8 oz. beef sirloin, cut across grain into ¼"-thick slices
- 1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced,

soaked in cold water for 30 minutes

⅓ cup cilantro leaves

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Arrange a rack 4" from broiler and heat. Put shallots and ginger on an aluminum foil-lined baking sheet and broil, turning often, until blackened, 15–20 minutes; let cool. Scrape peels off shallots and ginger; halve ginger lengthwise, press each piece with the side of a knife to flatten, and set aside with shallots. Heat fennel seeds, star anise, cinnamon, and cardamom in a small skillet over medium heat and toast, swirling pan, until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Transfer spices to a small bowl and set aside.

2. Place bones in a 12-qt. pot and cover with cold water by 1". Bring to a boil and cook for 3 minutes; drain and rinse bones. Clean pot and return bones to pot along with reserved shallots and ginger, beef, and 6 qts. cold water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; add reserved toasted spices, scallops, and 2 tbsp. salt. Cook, skimming surface, until beef is tender, 1½ hours.

3. Using tongs, transfer beef to a bowl of ice water and cool for 10 minutes. Drain beef and thinly slice crosswise; transfer to a plate, cover, and refrigerate. Continue cooking broth for 1½ hours more. Remove from heat and pour through a cheesecloth-lined fine strainer set over a clean 6-qt. pot; discard solids and skim fat from surface. Stir in fish sauce and scallion whites and keep hot. Combine vinegar and chiles in a small bowl and set aside.

4. Pour boiling water over noodles in a medium bowl and let soak until al dente, about 10 minutes. Rinse noodles in cold water, drain, and divide between 8 serving bowls. Top each with chilled, cooked beef and raw sirloin; top beef with onions, then scallion greens and cilantro. Season with pepper, and then ladle broth over each serving, placing one white scallion piece in each bowl. Serve with chiles on the side.

The Elements of Pho



The secret to making delicious *pho* is layering flavors to create a rich and fragrant broth. Thankfully, most of the ingredients used by Vietnamese cooks are readily available at Asian markets. Black cardamom, a seedpod about the size of an olive pit, gives *pho* its savory depth. The spice smells of menthol and smoke, and it imparts a surprisingly earthy aroma. Another *pho* signature spice, star anise, is a brown eight-pointed pod that lends a hint of licorice to the broth. When buying either spice, choose a store that has a high turnover of spices, to ensure freshness. Umami is also a defining flavor of *pho*, and two ingredients—fish sauce and dried scallops—help create that savory depth. When buying fish sauce for *pho*, look for a

Vietnamese-style sauce, such as the Three Crabs brand, which is delicately flavored and has a translucent reddish tea color. A few tablespoons added toward the end of the brewing process give the broth a funky richness. Dried scallops, meanwhile, are a natural alternative to MSG, infusing the soup with a saline dimension. Find them at Chinese markets, sold by the bag in the refrigerator case. For use in *pho* it's all right to buy the smallest, less-expensive scallops. Linguine-width rice noodles can be purchased in the dry-goods section of an Asian market; we like Three Ladies brand from Vietnam. Good rice noodles are silky yet toothsome when rehydrated in water. See THE PANTRY, page 100, for sources. —Gabriella Gershenson

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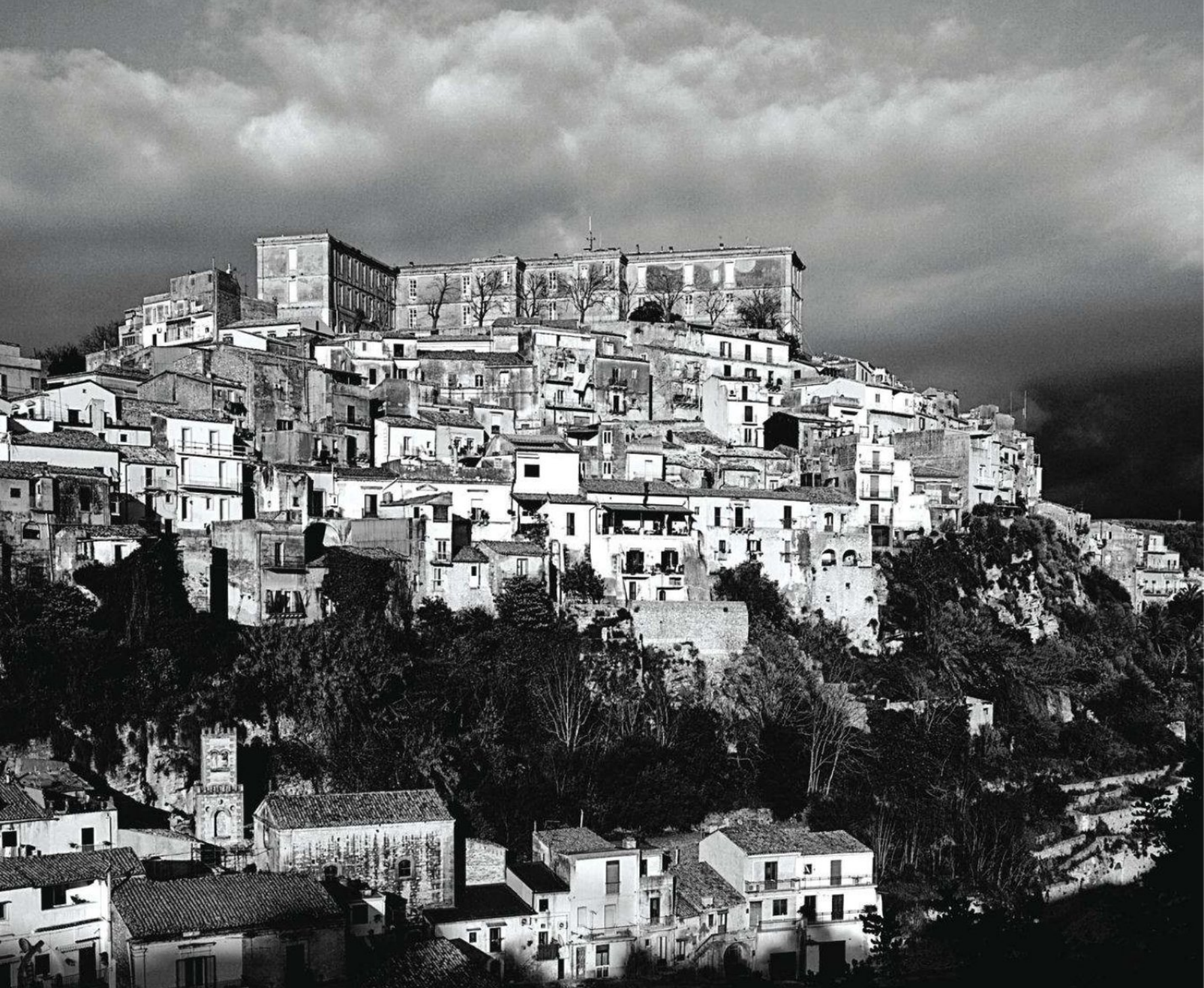


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Good Food, Good Life



SPECIAL FEATURE

Soul of Sicily

This ancient isle is home to one of the most fascinating—and delicious—cuisines in all of Italy. From cannoli to caponata, sparkling fresh seafood to stellar wines, talented home cooks to creative restaurant chefs, we pay tribute to everything that makes this place so unique.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LANDON NORDEMAN

The hilltop village of Ragusa in Sicily's northwest.

PART ONE
Home Cooking in Sicily

By Nancy Harmon Jenkins

Pino Maggiore's restaurant, Cantina Siciliana, is in the old Jewish quarter of Trapani, a harbor town at the extreme western end of Sicily, where ferries for Tunis come and go. There's a raffish maritime air about this city; since long ago—since Phoenician times, to be exact—ships and sailors have called on Trapani from all the major Mediterranean ports. Still, you might be surprised to find that couscous, those tiny semolina grains ubiquitous across North Africa, play a significant part on the Trapanese table,

and equally surprised that Pino, who is 51 years old, learned how to make it by hand as a child.

Couscous, or *cuscusu* as it's called in Sicilian dialect, is for me one of the most telling examples of Sicily's engaging melting-pot cuisine, a vestige (some historians believe) of the Berbers and North African Arabs who invaded the island more than a millennium ago and ruled it for a couple of centuries. Sicily's culinary history is like an intricate, multilayered pie—an *mpanata*, to use a Sicilian word borrowed from Spanish. The various elements come not just from Phoenicians and Arabs but also from Greeks and Romans, Byzantines, Normans, Germans, Aragonese, Spanish, and French, not to mention from modern-day Italians and other Europeans. Each group left its mark on Sicily—or rather, Sicily absorbed them all—and over the centuries, those influences have blended together in remarkable ways. Take Pino's couscous, which he prepares not with lamb and vegetables, as you'd see in the Arab world, but with a lusty *brodo di pesce*, or fish broth, scented with bay leaves and cinnamon sticks. It's a dish with one foot in Italy, another in North Africa, but it could belong only to Sicily.

I've been coming to Sicily for decades now, to research books and to introduce chefs and cooks to the foods of the island. My trips often begin with a meal at Pino's restaurant because his traditional approach elicits a quick understanding of what makes Sicily such a culinary gold mine. Here are the exotic touches—the couscous and currants and saffron—alongside beloved Sicilian staples; the hearty pastas, the incredible seafood and vegetables and citrus, the capers, the olives, the fresh ricotta, the wild fennel, and more. Unlike the rest of Italy, Sicily remains a bit mysterious and raw, the embodiment of an older Mediterranean culture and cuisine.

Over the years, I've come to believe that the heart and soul of Sicilian food, even as it's prepared at the best restaurants, is grounded in home cooking. The great cooks I've encountered here—from Pino

Maggiore in Trapani to Eleonora Consoli, a teacher at the other end of the island on the slopes of Mount Etna, to Zia Pina, tough-minded purveyor of a cookshop in Palermo—have all, at one time or another, described a dish to me as “something my mother”—or “my grandmother”—“used to make.” There's nothing new about this notion, for sure, but it seemed to me that what distinguishes Sicilian cuisine, what preserves it in a world where traditional foodways are often threatened, are those strong familial links going back generation upon generation, practically to the time of the ancients.

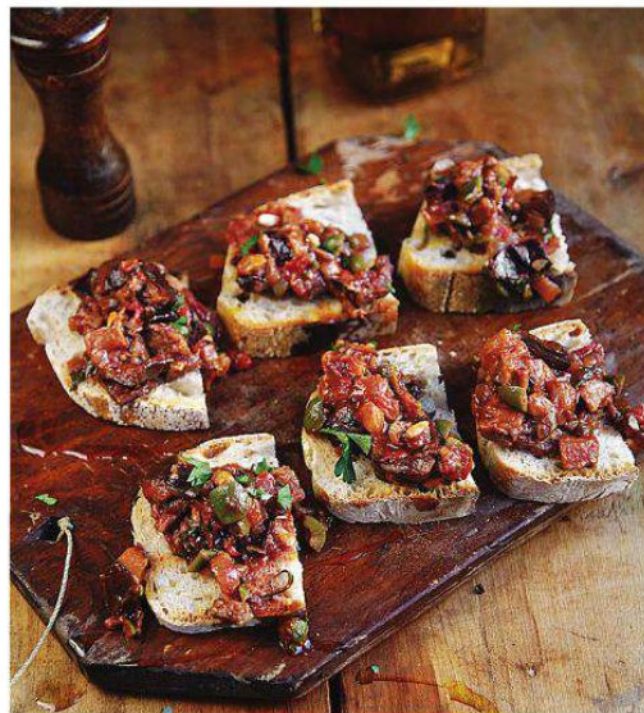
THINK OF SICILY AS THE ANCIENTS DID—as a giant triangle (they called it Trinacria) with one point nearly touching the toe of the Italian boot. The largest island in the Mediterranean, Sicily is smaller than Maine but larger than Vermont, and it encompasses some of the oldest cities in Italy (Palermo, Catania, Siracusa), one of the world's most active volcanoes (Etna), a bustling tourist trade along the coast, and a deeply rural agricultural society in the island's interior (where much of Italy's organic produce is grown).

Palermo, its capital, is Sicily's liveliest town, with more people but also more markets, more monuments, more restaurants, and arguably more traffic jams than any other. Catania, a couple of hours southeast on the *autostrada*, is more sober, in part because of the dark gray palette of the city, the result of at least seven historical inundations of lava flows from nearby Etna. But the fish market just off the main square is one of the most colorful in the entire Mediterranean, like a giant stage set every weekday morning as fishmongers call out their wares. Then there are the quiet inland cities that rise up from the green landscape, a jumble of medieval buildings like Enna and Caltanissetta, and villages like Polizzi Generosa, Salemi, even storied Corleone, that seem to belong to another time entirely.

A look at the map shows why Sicilian cuisine is such a heterogeneous mix. The island, which lies at the very heart of the Mediterranean, is a true crossroads. Here Africa first encountered Europe, and the Christian West came into contact with the Orthodox, Jewish, and Islamic cultures of the East. Early Greeks may have brought the first olive trees



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Clockwise from top left: pasta with sardines, fennel, and currants (see page 64 for a recipe); Giovanna Giglio Cascone samples the sauce for her tomato and cheese pie (see page 65 for a recipe); caponata (see page 62 for a recipe); friends and family celebrate Pasquetta, the day-after-Easter feast, at Fabrizia Lanza's home Case Vecchie, on the Regaleali estate in central Sicily.



to Sicily, while Arabs from North Africa possibly introduced pasta and a sweetened ice that evolved into gelato—along with almonds, which were first ground by the Arabs with sugar for the marzipan that is the basis for many of the island's most famous sweets. The Franco-Hispanic Bourbons established the fashion in the 19th century for a *monzù* or *monsieur*, a French-trained chef in aristocratic Sicilian households; and it was the Spanish, rulers of Sicily for almost 500 years, who brought from the New World capsicum peppers, both sweet and hot; chocolate, still made in the town of Modica, spiced with chile according to Aztec formulas; and, above all else, the tomato. With its sweet-tart flavors and vivid colors, tomatoes fit hand-in-glove with the Sicilian taste for *agrodolce* (sweet-sour), an ancient flavor pairing used with meat, fish, and vegetables.

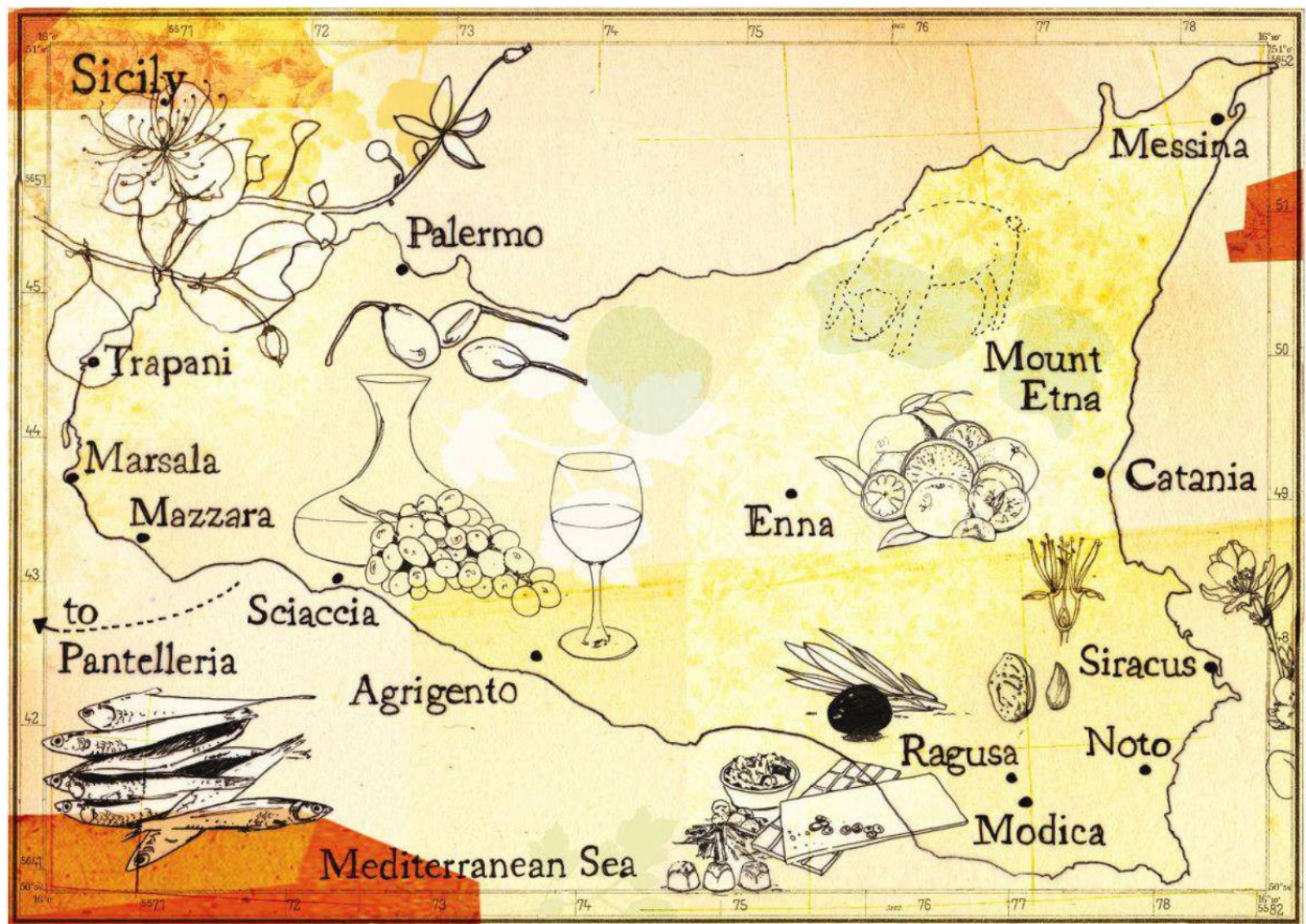
The best illustration of Sicily's complexity—culinary, historical, and otherwise—is caponata, the luscious mixture of eggplant (from the Arabs), tomatoes, and peppers (brought from the New World by the Spanish), that is like ratatouille but made exotic with a sweet-sour sauce (ancient Sicilian) and often topped with crushed almonds (from the Greeks for sure). You'll find it all over Sicily, as a side dish to go along with whatever else is on the table.

The most surprising version I've encountered was made by Eleonora Consoli a few years ago at her cooking school, Cucina del Sole, in Viagrande. After mixing the caponata, Eleonora lines the outside of a metal bowl with plastic wrap, then paints it with layers of melted bittersweet chocolate, studded with pine nuts, to create a dome. When

the chocolate is firm, she sets the dome over the caponata on its serving platter, brings it to the table, and cracks it with a spoon, shattering bits of chocolate and pine nuts throughout the mix. "Our family *monzù* [cook] taught me how to do that," she murmured by way of explanation.

I recently spent some time in the kitchen with Rosalba Lo Greco, who runs the kitchen at Le Case del Feudo, an *agriturismo* inn situated on a farm outside Siracusa that's owned by Barone Pietro Beneventano. Rosalba cooks each element of her caponata separately, then combines them, a technique she learned from her grandmother. When I mention Eleonora's chocolate, Rosalba tilts a skeptical eyebrow in my direction. "She says that in Catania they put chocolate in the caponata," she tells the Barone. She doesn't add, "I never heard of such an outlandish notion," but the unspoken comment hovers in her kitchen.

THE POINT IS THAT SICILIAN COOKS HOLD ON to their traditions fiercely. This applies to everyday dishes as well as celebrated feast foods: elaborate confections like the brightly colored ricotta-cream-and-almond-paste cakes called *cassatas* that are as ornately decorated as a bride, or, on the savory side, the intricate *timballo di maccheroni*, made famous in *The Leopard*. Written in 1958, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel details life amid the Sicilian aristocracy on the eve of Italian reunification in 1861 and the momentous social consequences that resulted. To this day it remains a brilliant analysis of Sicilian culture—and cuisine. When at a dinner party (continued on page 50)



MAP: TINA ZELLMER/ANNA GOODSON



Oliva con rosmarino e aranci, dry-cured olives with rosemary and orange (see page 64 for a recipe).

The Freshest Catch

The best way to understand the importance of seafood on the Sicilian table is to visit the fish market in Catania, which is as old as the ancient city itself. I watched it come to life one morning as workers unloaded their catches onto tables full of ice. There were heaps of gyrating octopuses, buckets full of snails and tiny clams, beautiful arrangements of eels and rays and any other form of sea life imaginable. The fish came from Mazara del Vallo, Italy's largest fishing port, in southwest Sicily, as well as smaller ports famed for specific things: anchovies from Sciacca, swordfish from Favignana. Teenage boys carried espressos in tiny plastic cups from nearby bars to the fishmongers, who—arms flailing and voices raised—were negotiating with housewives and wholesalers and chefs.

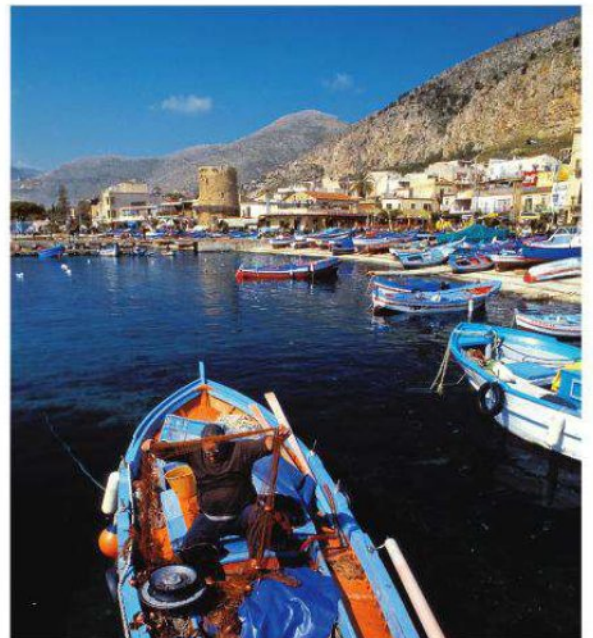
One of those chefs was Carmelo Chiaramonte, a Sicilian seafood expert and the author of *A Tutto Tonna* (Bibliotheca Culinaria, 2006), a fascinating Italian cookbook about the many species of tuna. "It's Lent, so we're eating even more fish than usual," he told me, rattling off a menu as we walked around the market streets: *brodo quaresimale* (a fish soup eaten on Ash Wednesday); *sarde a beccafico* (sweet-sour fried sardines stuffed with currants); spaghetti tossed with sea urchin, or with *neonata* (teeny just-born whitebait), or with slivers of *bottarga* (salt-cured tuna roe), to name just a few. Carmelo bought a handful of bright-red raw shrimp, just in from the Gulf of Catania, and led us to an outdoor table at a bar. He handed one to me, raw, and the shrimp's soft flesh melted on the tongue like sweet, salty butter. It was the most pristine and delicious seafood I've ever tasted.

"Sicilian food is all about the sea and the land," Carmelo said, pulling out fresh ricotta and bread he'd bought earlier. That Italian rule that says no cheese with fish? It doesn't apply here. Here, Pecorino gets sprinkled into *involtini* of swordfish and ricotta gets stuffed into squid. As we snacked and sipped zibibbo, a floral white wine that's often served with fish, Carmelo talked about the ancient fishing methods that many Sicilian fishermen still hold on to, like the elaborate *mattanza* nets used for harvesting tuna. By the time we finished our meal, the market had closed up shop and the streets were empty. —Dana Bowen





Clockwise from left: Fishmongers haggle over a tuna at the Catania fish market; mixed grilled seafood (see page 64 for a recipe) from Zia Pina's in Palermo; the harbor in Mondello, Sicily; fishermen weave creel nets in Filicudi, Sicily, circa 1960.



BOTTOM LEFT: TCI/© MARKA/ALAMY; BOTTOM RIGHT: PATRICK FRILET/© MARKA/ALAMY

(continued from page 46) Prince Fabrizio cracks the burnished golden pastry crust of the *timballo*, it discloses, in Lampedusa's words, "[an aromatic vapor], then chicken livers, hard-boiled eggs, sliced ham, chicken, and truffles in masses of piping hot, glistening macaroni, to which the meat juices gave an exquisite hue of suede."

But this loyalty to culinary traditions also applies to humble street foods and country fare, like *pasta con le sarde*, spaghetti dressed with sardines and wild fennel, a fisherman's dish with the exotic notes of currants and pine nuts; or *panelle*, the fried strips of chickpea flour dough, served from mobile fry shops amid the pulsing cacophony of Palermo's Ballarò market; or skewered sheep's or goats' intestines, called *stigghiole*, which you're as likely to find on the Easter table as you are at a street-side stall. Sicilians love their snack foods, and none more than *arancine*, the fried saffron-tinted rice balls filled with meaty *ragù*; at trendy cafés you can find them behemoth and with lots of creative fillings, from spinach to Gorgonzola. And they adore offal. Take Palermo's favorite, *pani cu' la meuza*, a staggeringly tasty sandwich of boiled veal or beef spleen with an optional dollop of ricotta or a shower of grated Pecorino; you can get it at street-side snack shops like Ninu U Ballerinu, where taxi drivers gather between shifts, or more formally at the Antica Focacceria San Francesco, where Garibaldi himself supposedly consumed the dish. Nowadays you'll see Palermitano matrons with arms and chins extended to keep greasy gravy from dripping on their mink coats.

There's an informality to the way Sicilians eat that allows them to honor—relish, really—the food and the company. I was reminded of this when I passed an afternoon at Zia Pina in Palermo's old town near the smaller Vucciria market. It's hard to call this a restaurant—or a trattoria, or an *osteria*—because to eat here is far more like sitting down in Pina's kitchen to sample her seafood fried to a crisp in a perfect batter, her grilled fish scattered with herbs and lemons, or anything else she feels like making that day. There's caponata, stuffed mushrooms, marinated artichoke hearts, and dozens of other dishes, all laid out on a table in front of her grill and fryer. You take what you want and you don't ask how much anything costs. That would be rude. When you're ready to leave, one of Pina's sons hands you a piece of paper with an amount scrawled on it, and you leave that amount on the table in cash.

There are a handful of renowned chefs in Sicily, acclaimed by

Italy's most influential food critics, and each is well worth a visit. (See "Sicilian Stars," page 60.) But when it comes to the Sicilian food I love, I look for home cooks above all, even if they happen to be cooking in a restaurant.

ONE OF THE MOST ESTEEMED SICILIAN home cooks is, alas, no longer with us. Anna Tasca Lanza died last year after a distinguished career as a writer and cooking teacher, promoting the island's complex food traditions along with the great wines of her family's Regaleali estate in the very heart of Sicily. In her heyday, Anna was also an adventurous culinary explorer. It was with her that I first sampled the fisherman's delicacy known as *lattume*, the rich, milky milt (or semen) of bluefin tuna, which the Tasca family chef, Monzù Mario Lo Menso, sliced and fried for us one lazy June afternoon. Another time she introduced me to the complex culinary folklore of San Giuseppe, whose feast day, March 19, is celebrated throughout Sicily with elaborate, ritualistic offering tables that almost always include breads molded to represent Joseph's beard, his staff, or his carpentry tools. In Vallelunga, near Regaleali, we went from house to house to admire and sample the breads.

Anna was a fine teacher, a trait her daughter Fabrizia—who now runs Regaleali's cooking school—has inherited. Anna loved to introduce early risers to the warm, soupy ricotta made each morning by the estate's shepherds and served in bowls with leftover bread to sop up the milky curds and whey. And she relished offering her astonishing *'strattu*, a handmade tomato extract she made each year in late summer, spreading a fresh tomato purée onto flat boards that were set out to dry in the sun. Each evening the boards were brought in and the gradually reducing extract was scraped and mixed, then set out again in the morning; after three days of the intense late August heat, the purée was thick as paste, a deep mahogany red, with a flavor like the purest extract of Sicilian sunshine.

The powerful flavor and fragrance of that tomato *'strattu* is what I've come to expect every time I go back to Sicily. It's not just tomatoes but the lemons, oranges, almonds, salted anchovies and capers, and *bottarga* (salted fish roe), not to mention the olive oils, the wines, the splendid sheep's and cows' milk cheeses. Whatever comes from this soil and this sea has a special intensity, a radiance that sets this blessed isle apart.

Arancine Step-by-Step



1. To form the *ragù*-filled rice balls called *arancine* (see page 62 for a recipe), place 1 heaping tbsp. of the rice mixture in the palm of your hand and flatten it into a disk, making a small well in the center for the filling. **2.** Place 1 tbsp. of the meat mixture in the well and form into a rough mound. **3.** Using your fingers, bring edges of the rice disk up and over the meat mixture to completely encase the filling. Roll gently in your palms to form a ball, slightly compacting the mixtures together. **4.** Dredge each rice ball in prepared batter, letting excess drip off, and then roll it in bread crumbs to coat evenly. **5.** Heat oil to 360°; working in batches, fry *arancine* until coating is golden brown and filling is hot, about 3 minutes. —Ben Mims



Arancine, Sicilian rice balls filled with *ragù* (see page 62 for a recipe).



Clockwise from top left: chickpea fritters (see page 62 for a recipe); bacon-wrapped scallions (see page 64 for a recipe); the lunchtime spread of antipasti at Zia Pina in Palermo; *scaccia ragusana*, tomato and cheese pie (see page 65 for a recipe).





PART TWO
Holy Week

By Dana Bowen

There was a reason we came to Sicily for Easter last year: during the week leading up to the holiday—*settimanasanta*, as it's called—there's a special energy in the air. You feel it in the markets, where butchers are busy trimming baby lambs for all the family feasts; at bakeries, where shoppers stock up on colorful breads adorned with eggs; and in the streets, where at any given moment you might catch a chord of distant music from one of the many processions moving through town. § These processions, which reenact the story of Easter, set the mood for the holiday. On Holy

Thursday in Trapani, I stumbled across a parade of people following a gilded, grief-stricken statue of Mary. Children's faces were hidden under black veils and the band played Sicilian funeral marches. It took more than a dozen men, their arms interlocked and faces contorted with effort, to carry that statue through the streets.

Sicilians plan their days and meals around these processions. I met up with Italian food writer Roberta Corradin and her friend Giovanna Giglio Cascone for pastries in Noto right before a Good Friday parade: a solemn one in which people walked through the torch-lit town in complete silence. On Saturday, we made plans to join Giovanna's family at another procession, but first we'd have lunch at her home in Ragusa. Giovanna prepared all the local Easter specialties: *scaccia ragusana*, a delicious roll-up of paper-thin dough slathered with tomatoes and Pecorino; succulent leg of lamb with rosemary and potatoes; *impanata di agnello*, lamb-and-parsley-filled pastry pies—all of it cooked in her wood-burning oven. The meal was the acme of Sicilian home cooking, and it went on for hours, long enough for some guests to break away to watch a soccer game or grab a nap before coming back for dessert.

Easter is, without a doubt, the most delicious time of the year in Sicily. All the spring foods—the first artichokes, the baby lamb, the tender fava beans, the ricotta, which is at its richest and most herbaceous—play into the holiday's spirit of renewal. In Palermo, I encountered another kind of spectacle at the Ballarò market, where vendors belted out operatic odes to their ingredients. "*Fragole, belle fragole! Ti fanno sentire vivo!*" [Strawberries, beautiful strawberries! They'll make you feel alive!]

On Easter morning we woke up to the sound of trumpets in the town of Modica. The vibe was joyous in the streets as crowds of people followed a statue of the risen Christ, waiting for it to encounter the procession of Mary. When that happened, the music stopped, the crowd hushed, and the two statues slowly embraced. This was the moment that all of the processions had been leading up to and it couldn't have been more beautiful or resonant. White doves flew out from beneath Mary's shroud, the music kicked back in, and everyone went home to eat.

Cooking teacher Fabrizia Lanza had invited me to join her family the next day for Pasquetta, the traditional day-after-Easter picnic, at

Regaleali, their wine-producing estate in the center of the island. It was a gorgeous day, and Fabrizia grilled baby lamb chops, sausage, and artichokes over an open fire in her courtyard. There were dozens of dishes set out on a table: chickpea fritters; olives flavored with rosemary and orange zest—things Fabrizia had learned from her mother, the late, great cookbook author Anna Tasca Lanza. When she brought out her jewel-toned *cassata* cake, filled with ricotta cream and rimmed with pistachio marzipan, the crowd complimented her and then descended on it. Fabrizia smiled. "We look forward to this meal all year."





An Eastertime procession in the Sicilian city of Trapani. Facing page: artichokes roasted in embers (see page 62 for a recipe).



Clockwise from top left: *cassata*, a ricotta and sponge cake rimmed with marzipan (see page 66 for a recipe); a man harvests wild fennel along the side of the road near Erice; Giovanna Giglio Cascone's Easter feast in Ragusa; roast leg of lamb with potatoes (see page 64 for a recipe).



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LONDON NORDEMAN (3); TODD COLEMAN



PART THREE

Sicilian Sweets

By Nick Malgieri

There were two things I dreamed of doing when I was young: becoming a pastry chef and going to Sicily. My paternal grandmother, Angelina Maggio Malgieri, was from Enna, a town in the center of the island, and when I was growing up in an Italian-American neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey, there were always plenty of cannoli, those crisp-fried pastry tubes filled with luscious ricotta cream, and other Sicilian sweets around. Her stepsister

even prepared an altar full of specialties, including elaborately decorated breads, every St. Joseph's day, in honor of the patron saint of Sicily.

By the time I finally visited relatives in Enna in 1974, I had already studied pastry in culinary school. A cousin took me to each and every *pasticceria* in town and waited patiently as I tried this cannoli, that *zeppole di San Giuseppe* (fritters filled and topped with ricotta cream, also called *sfinci*), and anything else that caught my eye. Many were familiar to me in appearance, but the taste of the real thing blew me away: the ricotta was richer, the citrus more perfumed, the almond flavor more intense. It struck me then and there that Sicilian sweets are not just the work of talented pastry chefs; they're the result of hundreds of years of unbroken tradition. I wanted to savor and remember every detail.

That first trip also made me realize just how different Sicilian sweets are from those you find in mainland Italy. Adorned with candied fruit, flavored with nuts, and enriched with sheep's milk ricotta (as compared with the milder cows' milk version), they owe their origins, like lots of other Sicilian foods, to the island's many layers of history, most notably the conquest by Saracen invaders from North Africa. By the end of the tenth century, the Saracens had introduced pistachios, oranges, lemons, and dates, as well as refined sugar and spices such as cinnamon and cloves. They brought the art of preparing elaborate pastries, ices, candied fruit, and almond- and pistachio-based confections. Later, these traditions blended with others; chocolate arrived from Spain during the renaissance, and in the 19th century, Swiss pastry chefs who had migrated to Sicily started blending it with ricotta in desserts. As

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Clockwise from left: a selection of marzipan sweets, known as *frutta di Martorana*, at Maria Grammatico's pastry shop in Erice; gelato with brioche; cannoli (see page 66 for a recipe); St. Joseph's Day fritters (see page 66 for a recipe).

LEFT AND MIDDLE RIGHT: LANDON NORDEMAN; TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT: TODD COLEMAN

Sicilian Stars

Sicily may appear to be the place that time forgot, but it actually lays claim to some of Italy's most creative chefs. It all began in the mid-1990s, when a handful of winemakers in the Mount Etna region, who had long sold their wine to be blended with French and Piedmontese reds, started focusing on their own bottles. Before long, international wine buyers and journalists began finding their way to the southeastern part of the island, where a quiet culinary revolution was under way.

The first chef to gain attention was Peppe Barone of Fattoria delle Torri in the medieval town of Modica. In the 1990s, Barone began experimenting with Modica's traditional dishes—such as rabbit cooked in chocolate sauce, a recipe that recalls the four centuries Sicily spent under Spanish rule. By lavishing attention on a home-style dish, he elevated Sicilian cooking in a way that had never been done in high-end restaurants. One of Barone's cooks, Carmelo Chiaramonte, adopted his mentor's local approach and, when he landed at Il Cuciniere in Catania, became an outspoken ambassador for superlative Sicilian ingredients like olive oil from Mont Iblei and blood oranges from Catania. And in Noto, Corrado Assenza, a fourth-generation pastry chef (pictured at right), introduced brilliant new sweets that were inspired by Sicily's history: things like basil-scented marzipan and jams that treat vegetables, such as peppers and zucchini, like fruit.

Eventually, Sicilian chefs who had left to cook in Europe and beyond started coming home. Ciccio Sultano led the way; after cooking at Felidia, Lidia Bastianich's restaurant in New York City, he returned to Sicily and in 2000 opened Duomo, where he won two Michelin stars for dishes like cannoli garnished with local pistachios and served with almond gelato in a pool of prickly pear sauce. There are many others—Pino Cuttaia at La Madia in Licata, Accursio Craparo at La Gazza Ladra in Modica. All of them are creating a bold, new Sicilian style that celebrates the island's rich tradition.

—Roberta Corradin



Chef Corrado Assenza standing outside his pastry shop, Caffè Sicilia, in Noto, Sicily.

a result, Sicilians have an astonishing repertoire of sweets, from gelato heaped into a *brioscia*, or brioche—the bun is a legacy of the French influence on Sicilian food—to thick puddings made with everything from coffee to watermelon juice, to the ricotta-filled cannoli that are beloved around the world.

It wasn't until I returned to research my book *Great Italian Desserts* (Little, Brown; 1990) that I got to know Sicilian bakers. I went to Noto, a lovely Baroque town just south of Siracusa that has a rich pastry tradition, to meet with Corrado Costanzo, whose family's shop is famed for its jasmine ice, made with mineral water in which flowers, picked at dusk, have steeped overnight. Corrado explained to me the important role convents and monasteries played in the history of Sicilian baking. At the beginning of the 19th century, he said, there were many in the region of Noto alone, and each one was famed for selling a different *dolce*.

The genesis of some of Sicily's most iconic sweets, like cannoli, is linked to convent bakers. Most historians believe that Saracen invaders brought cannoli to Sicily; another legend says the sweet was invented in the harem of Caltanissetta in central Sicily and brought to convents by a onetime harem member. (The former story is supported by the fact that fried pastries continue to thrive in Andalusia, Spain, from whence some of the conquering soldiers came.)

Not only were the convents bastions of tradition; they were (and are, where they remain) the most authentic source for classic Sicilian sweets. In Palermo, I sampled cannoli made with sheep's milk ricotta at the now shuttered monastery of Sant'Andrea. In Agrigento, I visited the Santo Spirito monastery of cloistered Cistercian nuns, famed for the sweet couscous with crushed pistachios that's made there.

But perhaps the most famous baker is Maria Grammatico, whom I visited at her shop in the mountain peak town of Erice. Grammatico's life story has been recounted in the book *Bitter Almonds*, which she coauthored with Mary Taylor Simeti (William Morrow & Co., 1994). She was raised in an orphanage run by Franciscan sisters, where she helped in the preparation of sweets. Deciding against the nun's life, Grammatico opened a modest *pasticceria*, which has since grown into one of the largest pastry businesses in Sicily. Grammatico, who is now 70, makes an amazing assortment of traditional cookies and small pastries, but her true talent lies in *frutta di Martorana* (marzipan fruit, named after the Palermo convent where they originated) shaped from almonds she grinds into a paste daily and paints in realistic colors.

Erice and Noto are two must-visit towns for pastry lovers. Though Corrado Costanzo passed away in 2002, his son, Luigi, and daughter, Giuseppina, continue to run the shop. Today, Noto's superstar pastry chef is Corrado Assenza, whose Caffè Sicilia serves both traditional and modernized versions of Sicilian sweets. The fourth generation of his family to run Caffè Sicilia (it was founded in 1892), Assenza is known for his creative fruit preserves in flavors like bergamot and mulberry. He pipes cannoli with the traditional ricotta filling, but also with dark chocolate and orange and vanilla cream. And you might think that the chile's heat in his orange and wild fennel ice cream is a modern twist, but that's the way his family has always made it.

"Tradition and innovation have had a long history of coexisting in Sicily," he says. Of course, he is right. While the Sicilian desserts I grew up enjoying back in the States are frozen in time, in Sicily they continue to evolve into even more delicious things. 🐘

The Guide Sicily

Dinner for two with drinks and tip: **Inexpensive:** Under \$20 **Moderate:** \$20–\$80 **Expensive:** Over \$80

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Letizia via Bottai 30, Palermo (39/091-589-110; hotelletizia.com). Rates: \$105 double. This lovely 16-room hotel offers spacious, recently updated rooms and a location (near the marina, with ample parking) that can't be beat.

Il Glicine via Castelforte 98A, Mondello (39/091-454-565; ilglicine.net). Rates: \$50 per person. Gabriella Pucci rents out rooms in her lovely 18th-century palazzo in Mondello, Palermo's relaxing seaside resort town that's just a 15-minute drive from downtown. Pucci's garden, filled with citrus trees and tropical plants, is a gorgeous oasis.

L'Orangerie Vico de Naro 5, Modica (39/3470-674-698; lorangerie.it). Rates: \$125 double. This beautifully restored family hotel, with two-story efficiencies and sprawling terraces that overlook Modica's medieval scape, is the perfect base for exploring the southeastern part of the island.

Locanda Tanarizzi via Giuseppe

Tasca, Valledlunga (39/3335-787-049; tanarizzi.it). Rates: \$118 double. Rosemarie Tasca d'Almerita runs this cheery hotel in a village near the Regaleali wine estate. She also rents out rooms in her home at Regaleali.

WHERE TO EAT

Cantina Siciliana via Giudecca 32, Trapani (39/092-328-673; cantina-siciliana.it). Moderate. Pino Maggiore's cozy trattoria serves excellent renditions of traditional Trapanese dishes, including *cuscusu* (couscous), served with a rich fish broth.

Antica Focacceria San Francesco via Paternostro 58, Palermo (39/091-320-264; afsf.it). Moderate. This 109-year-old eatery is the most beautiful spot in all of Sicily to sample *pani cu' la mezza*, the city's beloved Pecorino-topped spleen sandwich, along with *panelle* (chickpea fritters) and other snacks.

Zia Pina via Argenteria 67, Palermo (no phone). Moderate. You pick your fish (maybe a few prawns and squid and a whole mullet) and your prep-

aration (grilled or fried), then help yourself to Zia Pina's colorful table of antipasti: roasted potatoes, stuffed eggplant, caponata, marinated mushrooms, and more. Plan to wait for an outside table.

Antica Marina via Pardo 29, Catania (39/095-348-197; anticamarina.it). Moderate. This fish-centric restaurant, situated in the heart of Catania's fish market, has an antipasti spread that features dozens of seafood preparations, from octopus salad, to baby snails drizzled with excellent olive oil from nearby Mount Iblei, to raw oysters. The three young owners offer a fine selection of Sicilian wines from the Etna region.

Duomo via Capitano Boccheri 31, Ragusa (39/0932-651-265; ristoranteduomo.it). Expensive. Ciccio Sultano serves some of the most creative dishes in Sicily, from a selection of raw fish with mozzarella and various vegetable sauces, to his cannoli: piped with luscious sheep's milk ricotta and garnished with Bronte pistachios, Avola almond ice cream, and a soup of prickly pears.

Caffè Sicilia corso Vittorio Emanuele III 125, Noto (39/0931-835-013). Inexpensive. Corrado Assenza's century-old pastry shop offers extraordinary gelato, gorgeous layer cakes, and traditional Sicilian sweets. Pick up a jar or two of his raw honey and *marmellate* (jams), some of the best in Sicily.

Pasticceria Maria Grammatico via Vittorio Emanuele 14, Erice (39/092-328-673; mariagrammatico.it). Inexpensive. It's worth the trip to this tiny hilltop town to try Grammatico's incredible pastries, which include dozens of biscotti varieties like the chewy *sospiri*, rich with home-made almond paste.

COOKING SCHOOLS

Anna Tasca Lanza Sicilian Cooking Courses (39/3381-523-175; annatascalanza.com). Fabrizia Lanza teaches single-day classes to weeklong courses on everything from Sicilian sweets to seafood. Students stay at the stunning Case Vecchie, a series of medieval buildings on the Regaleali wine estate and farm.

Flavors of Sicily

Bright, earthy, and suffused with the intensity of the Sicilian sun: that's how I'd describe the elements of our cuisine. **Tomatoes** are foremost on the list; at the



end of August at Case Vecchie, my family's home in central Sicily, our kitchen counter and entire courtyard are covered with tomatoes as we cook them into sauce, dry them whole in the sun, and purée and reduce them into a sun-dried paste. These preparations will last us throughout the year, for pasta sauces, soups, and more. **Ricotta** is another staple.

In Sicily, sheep's milk ricotta, which is more fragrant and has a lighter texture than the cows' milk version, is used for pastries as well as pastas. You can approximate the fuller flavor of sheep's milk ricotta by adding some goat cheese to the cows' milk variety. **Olives**, both black and green, may be either cured in



brine or sun-dried; they've been a staple of the Sicilian table since the Greek and Roman times. We love them on their own as a snack, and we add their deep, saline flavor to sauces, breads, and more. When olive oil is very fresh, we use it on soups or as a bread dip with garlic, oregano, and sea salt. If I had to name one herb that defined Sicilian cooking, it would be **wild fennel**, which grows all over the island and tastes like a cross between anise and cultivated fennel. On the coast, it's a main ingredient in our *pasta con le sarde*, but up in the mountains cooks prepare meatballs with wild fennel that are astonishingly good. And then there's **citrus**, which grows all over Sicily and its surrounding islands: blood oranges, citronella, bergamot, and more. Lemons in Sicily are juicy, bright yellow, and not too acidic. We use the zest and the



flesh itself, in everything from vegetables to desserts.
—Fabrizia Lanza

APPETIZERS

Arancine

(Saffron Rice Balls)

Makes about 2 dozen

No snack is as beloved in Sicily as these saffron-scented rice balls filled with ragù (pictured on page 51).

- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- ½ small yellow onion, minced
- ½ small carrot, minced
- ½ rib celery, minced
- 3 oz. ground beef
- 3 oz. ground pork
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 2 tsp. tomato paste
- 1 small red onion, minced
- 1½ cups arborio rice
- ¼ tsp. crushed saffron
- 2 tbsp. grated Parmesan
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ¼ cup flour
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups bread crumbs
- Canola oil, for frying

1. Heat 1 tbsp. olive oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add onions, carrots, and celery and cook, stirring often, until soft, about 10 minutes. Add beef and pork and cook, stirring often, until browned, 10–12 minutes. Stir in tomato sauce and paste, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened, 45–50 minutes. Transfer meat filling to a bowl and let cool; refrigerate until chilled.

2. Heat remaining oil in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add red onion and cook, stirring, until soft, about 10 minutes. Add rice and stir to coat. Stir in saffron and 1½ cups water. Bring to a boil, cover, and remove from heat. Let sit for 20 minutes. Remove lid and stir in Parmesan, salt, and pepper. Spread rice out on a plate and let cool. Meanwhile, whisk together flour, eggs, and ½ cup water in a shallow bowl until smooth; place bread crumbs in another bowl and set both aside.

3. To assemble (see page 50 for a step-by-step guide), place 1 heaping tablespoon of rice in the palm of your hand; flatten into a disk. Place 1 tsp. chilled meat filling in center of rice disk and form rice around filling to encase it completely; press gently to form a ball. Roll ball in batter and then in bread crumbs until evenly coated. Transfer to a parchment

paper-lined baking sheet; repeat with remaining rice, meat mixture, batter, and bread crumbs. Refrigerate for 20 minutes to firm up.

4. Pour oil into a 6-qt. Dutch oven to a depth of 2" and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 360°. Working in batches, add rice balls to oil and fry until golden and heated through, about 3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer rice balls to paper towels; let cool for 5 minutes before serving.

Caponata

(Sweet and Sour Eggplant)

Serves 6–8

This classic vegetable dish (pictured on page 45) is rich and sweet with caramelized onions and raisins.

- 3 cups olive oil
- 2 lbs. eggplant, cut into 1" cubes
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 1 rib celery, roughly chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3 tbsp. tomato paste, thinned with ¼ cup water
- 1 cup crushed canned tomatoes
- 6 oz. green olives, pitted and roughly chopped
- ½ cup white wine vinegar
- ½ cup golden raisins
- ¼ cup salt-packed capers, rinsed and drained
- 3 tbsp. sugar
- 2 tbsp. finely grated unsweetened chocolate
- ½ cup finely shredded basil
- 2 tbsp. pine nuts

Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add eggplant and fry, tossing occasionally, until browned, 3–4 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer eggplant to a large bowl; set aside. Pour off all but ¼ cup oil, and reserve for another use. Return skillet to heat, add onions and celery, and season with salt and pepper; cook, stirring often, until beginning to brown, 10 minutes. Reduce heat to medium, and add tomato paste and cook, stirring, until caramelized and almost evaporated, 1–2 minutes. Add crushed tomatoes and continue cooking for 10 minutes. Stir in olives, vinegar, raisins, capers, sugar, and chocolate, and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 15 minutes. Transfer to bowl with eggplant,

along with basil and pine nuts, and mix together. Season with salt and pepper, and let cool to room temperature before serving.

Panelle

(Chickpea Fritters)

Makes 48 fritters

These addictive fritters (pictured on page 52) are a classic street food.

- 2½ cups chickpea flour
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Canola oil, for frying

1. In a 4-qt. saucepan, whisk together chickpea flour, salt and pepper, and 3 cups water until smooth. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until mixture becomes a thick paste, about 6 minutes. Reduce heat to low and continue stirring until mixture pulls away from side of pan, about 2 minutes more. Working quickly in batches, with a rubber spatula, spread ½ cup of the mixture into a 9"-diameter, ¼"-thick circles on parchment paper or aluminum foil (Keep saucepan warm so that dough remains spreadable.) Let dough disks sit until cool, 15–20 minutes.

2. When dough disks are cool, peel off paper and stack disks together like pancakes; cut stack into 8 wedges. Pour oil into a 6-qt. Dutch oven to a depth of 2"; heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 375°. Working in batches, add wedges and fry, turning occasionally, until golden and crisp, about 3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer wedges to a paper towel-lined plate and sprinkle with salt. Serve hot.

Carciofi Arrostiti

(Roasted Artichokes)

Serves 8

Though traditionally cooked in embers (see page 54), these artichokes are equally as succulent when oven-roasted

- 1½ cups olive oil
- 1½ cup dry white wine
- 2 tbsp. dried oregano
- 2–3 tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 12 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 6 globe artichokes, stemmed

Heat oven to 500°. In a medium bowl, whisk together oil, wine, oregano, chile flakes, garlic, and



Home cook Giovanna Giglio Cascone's Easter lamb pies (see page 65 for a recipe).

salt and pepper; set aside. Cut 1" off top of each artichoke and gently pull leaves apart to open artichokes. Place them, standing up on their bases, in a small roasting pan or dish large enough to hold them in one layer. Pour oil mixture over each artichoke, making sure it reaches in between all leaves. Cover with aluminum foil, and bake for 45 minutes. Uncover, and bake, basting often with juices, until browned and tender, about 30 minutes more. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving warm with pan juices.

Cipollate con Pancetta

(Bacon-Wrapped Scallions)

Serves 4

Butcher shops all across Sicily sell these bacon-wrapped scallions (pictured on page 52).

- 24 large scallions, trimmed
- 8 strips bacon or pancetta
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ¼ cup vegetable oil

Wrap 3 scallions together with 1 strip of bacon. Repeat with remaining scallions and bacon and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, add bacon-wrapped scallion bunches, and cook, turning as needed, until browned and crisp on all sides, 6–8 minutes. Serve hot.

Oliva con Rosemarino e Aranci

(Dry-Cured Olives with Rosemary and Orange)

Serves 6–8

Fabrizia Lanza shared her recipe for dry-cured black olives, flavored with orange and rosemary (pictured on page 47).

- 1 orange
- 1 lb. dry-cured black olives
- 1 large sprig rosemary, stemmed and roughly chopped
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Wash orange thoroughly; dry. Using a vegetable peeler, remove zest from orange, taking care to peel as little of the white pith as possible; roughly chop zest and transfer to a medium bowl. Juice orange and add juice to zest along with olives, rosemary, and pepper; toss to coat. Let sit at room temperature for 1 hour to marinate before serving.

MAIN COURSES

Pesce Grigliata

(Mixed Grilled Seafood)

Serves 4–6

This is the quintessential Sicilian supper (pictured on page 49): fresh seafood grilled to perfection with a squeeze of lemon juice.

- 6 medium head-on shrimp
- 4 medium whole squid,

separated into bodies and tentacles

- 3 medium red mullet, cleaned
- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- Dried oregano, to taste
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 lemons, quartered

Build a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill or heat a gas grill to medium-high. (Alternatively, heat a large cast-iron grill pan over medium-high heat.) Toss shrimp, squid, and mullet in a large bowl with oil to coat evenly; season with oregano, salt, and pepper. Grill seafood, turning as needed, until charred and cooked through, 3 minutes for squid, 6 minutes for shrimp, and 7–8 minutes for mullet. Transfer all seafood as it finishes cooking to a large platter and squeeze with lemon.

Cosciotto di Agnello con Patate

(Roast Leg of Lamb with Potatoes)

Serves 8

For this simple Sicilian Easter dish (pictured on page 56), a leg of lamb is roasted over a bed of potatoes.

- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 2 tbsp. dried oregano
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 bunch parsley, minced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 6–7-lb. leg of lamb, trimmed

- 8 large russet potatoes, peeled and quartered

Heat oven to 500°. In a medium bowl, combine oil, chile flakes, oregano, garlic, parsley, and salt and pepper to make a paste; rub paste over surface of lamb. Set lamb in a large roasting pan and place pan in oven; roast until lamb is browned, about 30 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 400°, cover lamb with aluminum foil, and continue cooking for 40 minutes. Remove foil, add potatoes to pan, and toss with rendered fat; continue cooking until potatoes are tender and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of lamb reads 140°, 45–50 minutes more. Let rest for 20 minutes before serving.

Pasta con le Sarde

(Pasta with Sardines)

Serves 8

The recipe for this classic dish flavored with saffron and sardines (pictured on page 45) is based on one in *The Heart of Sicily* by Anna Tasca Lanza (Clarkson Potter, 1993).

- 1½ lbs. cleaned fresh sardine filets (about 50)
- Semolina flour, for dredging
- 1 cup olive oil
- 2 medium fennel bulbs, finely chopped, fronds reserved
- 2 medium yellow onions, finely chopped
- 3 tbsp. tomato paste
- 6 oil-packed anchovy filets,

10 Fantastic Sicilian Wines

Sicily has more vineyards than any other region in Italy; it also grows more grapes. Granted, the vast majority of those vineyards raise grapes for marsala, the sweet and dry fortified wine (originally created by a British trader in the 18th century) that's produced in the seaside town of the same name. But in recent years, there's been a lot of excitement around Sicily's regular red and white wines, as producers of bulk wines have started focusing on the quality of their own bottles. "The rediscovery of

Sicilian *terroirs* is accompanied by a boom of smaller-scale quality wine production," writes Robert V. Camuto in his excellent new book *Palmento: A Sicilian Wine Odyssey* (University of Nebraska Press, 2010). "In 1990 the number of commercial Sicilian wine producers was little more than three dozen; today the number is approaching three hundred." While the island's more established producers (like Tasca d'Almerita of Regaleali in central Sicily) have long bottled varietals like cabernet



Tasca d'Almerita Regaleali Bianco (\$14) A full-bodied, beautiful blend of grecanico, inzolia, and cataratto grapes, this aromatic white is a natural for seafood.



COS Pithos 2008 (\$50) From one of Sicily's most renowned wine-makers, this nero d'avola and frappato blend (aged in terra-cotta amphorae) has an earthy, cedary edge.



Cottanera Etna Rosso 2007 (\$57) Made mainly with nerello mascalese, this rich, mineral red is our favorite bottle from Etna; great with swordfish.



Manenti Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2008 (\$22) A blend of nero d'avola and frappato, this wonderfully cherry-scented wine pairs well with lamb and pastas.



Occhipinti Il Frappato 2008 (\$35) This fruit-forward wine made by 28-year-old Arianna Occhipinti has soft raspberry notes and nice acidity. We love her whites, too.

- drained and finely chopped
- 1 cup tomato sauce
 - 3 tbsp. dried currants
 - 3 tbsp. pine nuts
 - 1 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
 - ¼ tsp. saffron
 - Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
 - 1 lb. spaghetti

1. Heat ¼ cup olive oil in a 10" skillet over medium-high heat. Toss 6 sardine filets in semolina to coat, shaking off excess, and then fry in oil until golden brown, about 4 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain, and then roughly chop and set aside. Heat remaining oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add fennel and onions, and cook, stirring occasionally, until caramelized, about 20 minutes. Roughly chop and add remaining sardines along with the tomato paste and anchovies, and cook, stirring often, until broken down and melted into the sauce, about 5 minutes. Add tomato sauce, currants, pine nuts, nutmeg, saffron, and salt and pepper; reduce heat to medium-low and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 20 minutes.

2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and add pasta; cook until al dente, 7–8 minutes. Drain and transfer pasta to sauce along with fennel fronds and toss until evenly coated; top with reserved fried sardines and serve immediately.

Scaccia Ragusana

(Tomato and Cheese Pie)

Serves 10–12

Don't sweat the folding technique for this chewy, tomato and cheese pie (pictured on page 52). "The uglier your scaccia looks, the better it tastes," says Roberta Corradin, who gave us the recipe.

- 3 ½ cups durum wheat flour
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for greasing
- 1 tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 28-oz. can crushed tomatoes
- 1 bunch fresh basil
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 12 oz. caciocavallo or Pecorino Romano cheese, grated

1. Place flour in a large bowl and make a well in center; add 2 tbsp. oil, salt, and 1 ¼ cups water, and stir until a dough forms. Transfer dough to a floured work surface and knead until smooth and elastic, 6–8 minutes. Transfer dough to a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rest for 30 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, heat remaining oil in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium heat. Add garlic and cook, stirring often, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add tomatoes and basil, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, to meld flavors, about 10 minutes. Discard basil,

remove pan from heat, and set aside to let cool.

3. Heat oven to 500°. Transfer dough to a floured work surface, and using a rolling pin, roll dough into a ¼"-thick rectangle. Arrange the dough so that the long sides are parallel to you. Spread 1 cup tomato sauce over dough in a thin layer and sprinkle with 1 ½ cups cheese; season with salt and pepper. Fold left third of dough toward center, spread top with ¼ cup sauce, and sprinkle with 5 tbsp. cheese; season with salt and pepper. Fold right third over center to meet left edge, and repeat with sauce, cheese, and salt and pepper. Fold in top and bottom so they meet in center; spread top with remaining sauce and cheese; season with salt and pepper. Fold top half over bottom half, like closing a book, and transfer to a baking sheet lined with parchment paper; bake for 10 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 400° and continue baking until dough is set and slightly charred, about 60–65 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes before slicing into squares and serving.

Impanata di Agnello

(Easter Lamb Pie)

Serves 4

Home cook Giovanna Giglio Cascone name taught us how to make these juicy lamb pies (pictured on page 63).

- 2 ¼ tsp. active dry yeast

- 2 ¼ cups durum wheat flour
- 1 tbsp. vegetable shortening
- ¾ tsp. kosher salt, to taste
- 4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 12 oz. lamb shoulder, thinly sliced
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped basil
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped oregano
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped parsley
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 egg, beaten

1. Combine yeast and ¾ cup water heated to 115° in a small bowl and let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Place flour in a large bowl and form a well in center; add yeast mixture, shortening, and ¼ tsp. salt and mix until dough forms. Transfer to a floured work surface and knead until smooth, 6–8 minutes. Transfer dough to a lightly oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let sit until doubled in size, about 1 hour. Meanwhile, mash remaining salt and garlic into a smooth paste and combine with lamb, basil, oregano, parsley, and a generous amount of pepper in a medium bowl; set aside.

2. Heat oven to 475°. Using a knife, cut away one third of dough; cover with plastic wrap and set aside. Using a rolling pin, roll remaining dough until ½" thick and trim to make a 9" circle; transfer circle to a parchment paper-lined baking sheet and mound lamb mixture in center, leaving a 1" border around edge. Using a pastry brush, brush border

sauvignon and chardonnay, now winemakers are calling attention to Sicily's indigenous grapes. Probably the best-known red grape is nero d'avola, which can range in flavor from jammy and full-bodied to earthy and spicy. In the region Cerasuolo di Vittoria, nero d'avola is often blended with frappato, a fruity grape with a sweet raspberry flavor, which can also be delicious when bottled on its own. Though grapes have grown on the volcanic slopes of Mount Etna since the fifth century

B.C., there's a lot of new interest in the area. The main white variety is carricante, which is light in color but had a big, almost yeasty aroma in the bottles we tried. Etna's best-known red is nerello mascalese, which evokes the gentle fruit flavors of pinot noir (it's often blended with another indigenous grape, nerello capuccio). Below are some of our favorite food-friendly Sicilian bottles (see THE PANTRY, page 100, for ordering information). —Dana Bowen



Benanti Serra Della Contessa 2004 (\$40) Leather, spice, dried fruit, made from century-old nerello mascalese and nerello capuccio vines from Etna. Perfect with pork.



Planeta Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2008 (\$22) This medium-bodied wine from one of Sicily's largest producers has hints of dried figs and pepper, with macerated cherries and tannins.



Passopisciaro 2007 (\$30) From the Etna region, this light-bodied red (mostly nerello mascalese) has hints of candied cherries, smoke, and orange peel. Great with lamb as well as fish.



Bonavita Faro (\$38) A medium-bodied nerello mascalese from Messina, with rich cherry flavors and subtle hints of spice and cloves. Pairs fabulously with meats and pastas.



Benanti Pietramarina Etna 2007 (\$38) Made with 100 percent carricante grapes, this crisp, yeasty white has hints of peaches and herbs and pairs well with all seafood.

with egg. Roll remaining dough until $\frac{1}{8}$ " thick and trim to form a 8" circle; place circle on top of lamb mixture and bring border of larger circle up to meet edge of smaller circle, pinching edges together to seal. Repeat around circles, crimping edge as you go, to form a pie; brush whole pie with egg and poke a paring knife in center of top to vent. Bake until pie is golden brown and cooked through, 25–30 minutes. Let cool for 15 minutes before slicing and serving.

DESSERTS

Cannoli alla Siciliana

(*Sicilian Ricotta-Filled Pastries*)

Makes about 24

Ricotta impastata (see page 100), a smoother and drier version of ricotta, is typically used for filling cannoli (pictured on page 59). This recipe comes from cookbook author Nick Malgieri.

FOR THE DOUGH:

- 2½ cups flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed and chilled
- 5 tbsp. red wine
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 egg white, lightly beaten
- Canola oil, for frying

FOR THE FILLING:

- 1 lb. ricotta, drained overnight in a cheesecloth-lined strainer, or ricotta impastata
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. orange zest
- Amarena cherries, halved, to garnish (see page 100)
- Candied orange peel strips, to garnish

1. Make the dough: In a large bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, cinnamon, and salt; add butter and rub it into flour with fingers until mixture resembles bread crumbs. Add wine and 2 eggs and mix until dough forms. Transfer dough to floured work surface and knead until smooth, 6–8 minutes. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for 1 hour.

2. Divide dough into quarters; working with one quarter at a time, pass dough through widest setting on pasta roller. Decrease setting by one

notch and pass dough through roller; repeat, decreasing width by one level each time, until $\frac{1}{16}$ " thick. Using a 4" round cutter, cut out dough and transfer to parchment paper; repeat with remaining dough. Working with one dough circle at a time, wrap dough around a 1" x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " cannoli core (see page 100), and brush edges with egg white to seal. Repeat with remaining dough; set aside.

3. Pour oil into a 6-qt. pot to a depth of 2" and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Working in batches, fry cannoli until light brown and crisp, 1–2 minutes. Using tongs, transfer cannoli to paper towels to drain; while hot, carefully remove cannoli shell from core and set aside on a wire rack to cool.

4. Make the filling: Combine ricotta, sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, and orange zest in a large bowl and whisk until smooth, 2–3 minutes. Transfer to a piping bag fitted with a $\frac{3}{4}$ "-wide plain tip. Pipe ricotta mixture into cannoli shells to fill. Garnish each end with a cherry half and orange peel strip.

Cassata

(*Ricotta Cake*)

Serves 10–12

Fabrizia Lanza taught us to make this classic Sicilian cake (pictured on page 56), rimmed in pistachio marzipan. For a step-by-step guide, see facing page.

Butter, for greasing pan

- 1 cup plus 2 tbsp. flour, sifted, plus more for pan
- $\frac{3}{8}$ cup plus $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 tsp. orange zest
- 6 eggs
- 1 cup shelled pistachios
- 3 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 egg white, lightly beaten
- 2 tbsp. Grand Marnier liqueur
- 1 lb. ricotta, drained overnight in a cheesecloth-lined strainer, or ricotta impastata
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 tsp. plus 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- Whole candied fruits, such as oranges, apricots, and cherries, halved
- Candied citron, cut in strips

1. Heat oven to 350°. Grease and flour a 9" cake pan; set aside. Combine $\frac{3}{8}$ cup sugar, zest, and eggs in a

large bowl and beat on high speed of a mixer until pale and light, about 5 minutes. Add flour and fold to combine. Pour into cake pan and smooth top. Bake until a toothpick inserted in center of cake comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Transfer pan to a wire rack, let cake cool completely, and remove cake from pan. Using a serrated knife, cut cake crosswise into $\frac{1}{2}$ "-thick strips; set aside.

2. Line bottom and sides of a 12" metal pie plate with plastic wrap; set aside. Process pistachios in a food processor until finely chopped. Add 1 cup confectioners' sugar and process until finely ground. With processor running, slowly add enough egg white to form a smooth dough. Transfer dough to a work surface dusted with confectioners' sugar and knead until smooth. Using a rolling pin, roll marzipan until $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick. Cut into 2"-wide strips and line side of pie plate with strips, flattening where they overlap to form one continuous ring; set aside.

3. Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook until sugar dissolves, then stir in Grand Marnier; set aside. In a large bowl, whisk together remaining sugar, ricotta, vanilla, and cinnamon until smooth, 2–3 minutes; set aside.

4. To assemble, line bottom of prepared pie plate with cake strips, cutting to fit, and then sprinkle with 5 tbsp. Grand Marnier syrup; place ricotta mixture on top of cake and spread evenly to fill pie plate, smoothing top. Cover top of ricotta mixture with remaining cake slices, cutting to fit evenly, and drizzle with remaining syrup; trim excess pistachio marzipan and then wrap pie plate in plastic wrap and refrigerate until chilled, 2 hours. Meanwhile, combine remaining confectioners' sugar and lemon juice in a medium bowl to make a thick glaze. Invert pie plate onto a serving dish and peel off plastic wrap. Pour glaze over cake to cover evenly. Decorate with candied fruits. Refrigerate cake until set, 2 hours or overnight.

Zeppole di San Giuseppe

(*St. Joseph's Day Fritters*)

Makes about 18

The recipe for these crunchy fritters (pictured on page 59), courtesy of Malgieri, are topped with a cinnamon-ricotta filling.

FOR THE FRITTERS:

- 2 tsp. sugar plus 1 cup
- 1¼ cups milk
- 5 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 tbsp. white rum
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 cups flour
- 5 eggs
- 1 tbsp. ground cinnamon
- Canola oil, for frying
- Amarena cherries, halved, to garnish (see page 100)

FOR THE FILLING:

- 1 lb. ricotta, drained overnight in a cheesecloth-lined strainer, or ricotta impastata
- 1 cup confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp. orange zest

1. Make the fritters: Bring 2 tsp. sugar, milk, butter, rum, and salt to a boil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add flour; stir vigorously with a wooden spoon until dough begins to dry, 2–3 minutes. Transfer dough to bowl of stand mixer fitted with paddle and beat on medium-high speed. Add eggs one at a time, until each is incorporated fully; dough should be smooth and hold peaks when lifted from paddle. Transfer dough to piping bag fitted with $\frac{1}{2}$ " star tip, and pipe 2½"-diameter circles onto parchment paper. Using scissors, cut out paper around each fritter; set aside. In a small bowl, combine remaining sugar and cinnamon; set aside.

2. Make the filling: Combine ricotta, sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, and orange zest in a large bowl and whisk until smooth, 2–3 minutes. Transfer to piping bag fitted with a $\frac{1}{2}$ " star tip; set aside.

3. Pour oil into a 6-qt. Dutch oven to a depth of 2"; heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Working in batches, invert fritters into oil and baste paper with oil until it releases. Remove paper with tongs and continue frying, turning once, until puffed and light brown, 3–4 minutes. Remove fritters from oil and set on paper towels to drain briefly. Transfer to bowl of cinnamon sugar, toss to coat evenly, and then transfer to a serving plate. Pipe about 1 heaping tbsp. ricotta filling into center of each fritter and top with a cherry half; serve immediately.



Cassata Step-by-Step

1. To form *cassata* (ricotta cake; see recipe at left), start with marzipan rim: process 1 cup pistachios and 1 cup confectioners' sugar in a food processor until finely ground. Transfer to work surface and add half a beaten egg white; stir until dough forms. Continue adding egg white until dough holds together but is not sticky; you will not use an entire egg white. (Alternatively, combine all ingredients in food processor for smoother dough). **2.** Using a rolling pin, flatten on a work surface dusted with confectioners' sugar until $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick; cut marzipan lengthwise into 2"-long strips. **3.** Line a 12" metal pie plate with plastic wrap and place marzipan strips along sides of plate, pressing together at seams to make one continuous band. Line bottom of plate with slices of sponge cake. **4.** Spread ricotta filling evenly over cake slices using a rubber spatula. **5.** Top filling with remaining cake slices until completely covered. **6.** Place a serving plate upside down on top of pie plate and invert both together so that bottom of pie plate faces up. Remove top pie plate and plastic wrap and refrigerate *cassata* until firm, 2 hours. **7.** Combine 2 cups confectioners' sugar with 2 tbsp. plus 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice in a medium bowl; stir until a thick glaze forms. Pour glaze over top of *cassata*; using a rubber spatula, spread glaze to cover cake slices completely. **8.** Cut a whole candied orange into quarters, making sure not to cut completely through rind so that quarters remain intact, and place in center on top of *cassata*. **9.** Continue decorating cake with halved and quartered candied pears and cherries and long strips of candied citron. —Ben Mims



The Sweet



Life

In the Quebec countryside,
the flow of maple syrup
anticipates the coming of spring

By Sasha Chapman
Photographs by Landon Nordeman

TODD COLEMAN



ARE YOU BOILING TODAY?" asks Nathalie Decaigny, on the phone at her home in Auclair, a tiny hamlet in Bas-St-Laurent, Quebec's second-largest maple syrup-producing region. It's the only way to start a conversation during early spring, when the sugaring-off season is drawing to its close. The columns of maple-scented steam rising from the dense forests are a sure sign that neighbors are still busy in their sugar shacks, evaporating the colorless, nearly tasteless sap they've collected over the past several weeks into sweet, amber syrup, some of the finest in the world.

Because the flow of sap is so temperature-dependent—sugar stored in a tree's roots moves into the trunk only when the mercury rises—it makes for a tight bond between neighbors. Everyone is in the same predicament: often tied to the shack until the wee hours, feeding the roaring furnace with splits of maple wood, and boiling furiously to keep up with the flow. Friends trade gossip about the going rate for a barrel of No. 1 grade syrup and fuel themselves with maple-sweetened meals: *fèves au lard*, beans cooked with pork fat drenched in syrup; hand-carved smoky-sweet ham with a maple glaze; sticky walnut-topped maple squares lavished with spoonfuls of cold, thick cream.

To me, a first-time visitor to this outlying part of Quebec, the whole scene is comfortingly familiar. Like many Canadians, I grew up with a family tradition of sugaring. In my grandfather's day, we had a horse to pull the sap barrels to our sugar shack on the south shore of Lake Simcoe in southern Ontario; later, at my uncle's nearby farm, I was the draft horse, staggering across the snowy field with buckets of sap to be poured into the jury-rigged evaporator. I'd stand next to the pot, breathing the clouds of steam, waiting for my first taste of the boiled sap—smoky, sweet, and caramel. My cousins kept several grades in the freezer (where it lasts longer); they reserved a bottle of the darkest stuff we had for summer desserts. We'd eat

the deliciously intense No. 2 grade syrup (see "Making the Grade," page 75) over vanilla or walnut ice cream at the family cottage. I now write my children's initials in maple syrup as I pour it over thick natural yogurt, just as my mother once did for me.

I'm not alone in my love for it. Here in Canada, maple syrup is the culinary equivalent of hockey—a national obsession (our flag bears a maple leaf, after all). How it improves pancakes, coffee, doughnuts, beans, and ham is one of the few subjects on which all Canadians can agree. I often add a little to my salad dressings to balance the acid, and a bit of syrup in a stir-fry of ginger

meals of pork and beans, crêpes, and eggs. Even chefs like Montreal's Martin Picard, of the restaurant Au Pied de Cochon, have made a cause out of reviving the *cabane à sucre*. Yet in pockets of rural Canada, sugaring is very much a living tradition. Last March, drawn to the promise of reliving the sweet early springs of my childhood and tired of the slush-brown city streets of Toronto in late winter, I decided to make a sojourn. Following the advice of a syrup-obsessed friend in Montreal, I traveled to remote Auclair, about 200 miles northeast of Quebec City, to spend some time making and eating maple syrup with Nathalie Decaigny and her husband, Val-lier Robert.

Quebec produces close to 75 percent of the world's supply of maple syrup, which is used in abundance in Quebecois cuisine. *Tarte au sucre d'érable*, a fudgy pie made with cream, milk, and syrup, is ubiquitous throughout the province. (Nathalie Decaigny serves hers with whipped cream sweetened with maple syrup and frozen blackcurrants that she picks from her garden in the summer).

It's just as common in savory dishes: fresh tomatoes slow-roasted until jammy with maple syrup and olive oil, or mushroom and wild rice soup with an added dose of syrup for unexpected depth. At Panache restaurant in Quebec City, they use it to lacquer local duck as it spit-roasts to



I'D STAND NEXT TO THE POT, BREATHING IN THE CLOUDS OF STEAM, WAITING FOR MY FIRST TASTE OF THE SWEET BOILED SAP

and bok choy tastes just right. My favorite local bacon is cured in it, as are innumerable other proteins, like the gently smoked salmon that chef Mark McEwan has been making for the past 14 years at North 44 restaurant in Toronto. Though we continue to eat an awful lot of syrup, today, as more of Canada's population migrates to cities, gathering in a sugar shack has become something of a nostalgic adventure; chartered buses take urbanites like me, whose family shacks are long gone, out to the countryside during sugaring season for old-fashioned sugar shack

moist, crackling perfection. Indeed, maple syrup knows no boundaries: cook it down a little and it makes the ideal sauce for the simple cake known as *pouding chômeur* (poor man's pudding), but it's equally welcome sweetening local foie gras that's been raised on the plains near the Quebec-Vermont border. And when I'm really thirsty and craving something slightly (*continued on page 74*)

SASHA CHAPMAN's most recent story for *SAVEUR* was "August's Feast" (August/September 2009).

Above, crêpes with maple sugar and syrup (see page 80 for a recipe). Facing page, an *acériculteur* in St-Augustin, Quebec, taps a tree in early spring.





Valentin Deslauriers, who runs a sugar shack in Auclair, Quebec, checks his syrup's sugar density; facing page, clockwise from top left: biscuit dumplings in maple syrup; rolling maple taffy in snow; maple sugar pie; Romane Robert in her parents' Auclair kitchen (see page 80 for the recipes).

(continued from page 71) sweet, I pour a spoonful into the bottom of a glass and top it with soda water. It's like a maple ginger ale only better. I wanted to understand what makes it so superlative and what accounts for its versatility—how, I wondered, can it sometimes taste like vanilla and at other times of smoke?

As I soon found out, the quality of Quebec's syrup has something to do with its long-held pedigree. Sixteenth-century French explorers learned the art of sugaring off—the term for boiling maple sap into syrup—from the Malécite Indians who lived along the St. Lawrence River in southeastern Quebec. To collect sap from the black, red, and sugar maple trees that thrive in this cold climate, natives would make a cut into a tree with a tomahawk in late winter. As daytime temperatures rose above freezing, sugar stores in the tree's roots would move through the trunk to nourish the tree for spring buds. At night, the trunk constricts in the freezing weather and sucks the water and sugar upward. During the day, when temperatures become warmer, pressure in the trunk pushes the sap down through the trunk, and the Indians collected it in birch-bark buckets. They would then freeze the sap or drop in hot rocks to remove excess water, leaving the sugary syrup behind. Though the tools have changed over the centuries, the basic methods have remained the same, as has the math: 40 gallons of sap still boil down to just one gallon of syrup. That simple equation—measured against the prohibitive cost of cane sugar—amounted to round-the-clock seasonal work for Quebec's *habitants* in the 1800s. For four or five weeks these tenant farmers would boil sap far into the night to keep up with the copious flow. Eventually, families took to building *cabanes à sucre*, small shacks on the edge of their maple forests outfitted with chimneys and stoves and, later on, evaporators made of English tin and equipped with long rectangular pans that could simmer gallons of syrup at a time.

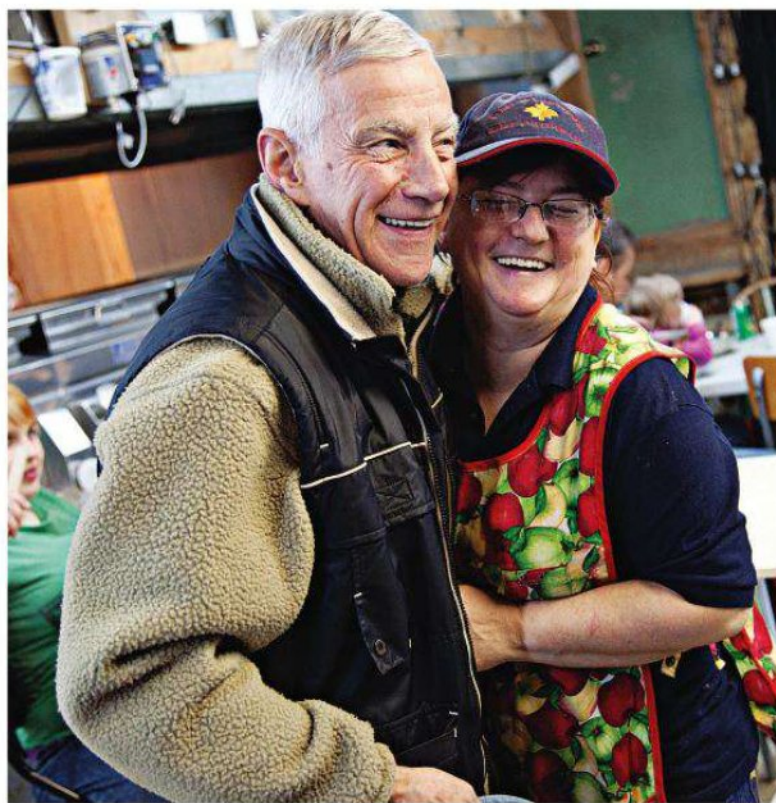
Above, Nicole Chouinard and a longtime customer at Érablière Gilles et Nicole Chouinard, the sugar shack she owns with her husband in St-Juste-du-Lac, Quebec.

Vallier Robert learned the art of sugaring off from his father, Charles-Aimé. An Auclair legend, Charles-Aimé had come up with a plan in the 1970s to save his dying logging community: he turned a local pastime into a money-making enterprise, forming a cooperative to share equipment costs and modernizing the sugaring-off process there. Today, at Domaine Acer, his son and daughter-in-law tend 11,500 taps that produce some of the tastiest syrup I've ever drizzled over pancakes, as well as whipped maple butter, maple jellies, and smooth maple dessert wine. They also run a small museum next to their house, which chronicles the history and science of

son to start. Then one day, usually in early March, the sun begins to burn a little brighter. The snow that blankets the landscape begins to soften at the edges. Runoff carves a trickling path down the slopes. Vallier notices the smell of sweetness in the new spring air, a sure sign that the sap will soon run.

Vallier, as well as his brother, Janel, who tends to 3,500 taps of his own, are called *acériculteurs*, a word that might translate as “maplers.” In Quebec, a mapler doesn't just make syrup; he also takes care of the forest, thinning out the trees so the remaining maples get sufficient sun to grow big and hardy enough to tap. The Roberts must think in decades, if not centuries: they let trees grow for 30 or 40 years before tapping them. A responsible family of *acériculteurs* could keep tapping those trees until they reach about 200 years—their natural lifespan. “What I exploit now is what my ancestors left me,” says Janel.

Like most *acériculteurs*, Vallier drills new holes in his trees every winter (with time, the old holes grow over), fitting them with metal spouts attached to plastic tubing, which laces and loops along the forest floor. Through these veins, the sap runs toward one of the pumping stations, a tiny shack with a small reservoir where the liquid collects. When the reservoir is full, the sap is flushed out into thicker tubes that carry it downhill, eventually pooling in one of three 10,000-liter stainless-



VALLIER IS MOST INTERESTED IN THE TRANSFORMATION—CREATING SOMETHING SINGULAR, AND DELICIOUS, FROM SAP

maple production. Even so, Vallier is not so much interested in tradition as he is in what he calls the “transformation”—creating something singular, and delicious, from sap.

In Auclair, the winters are long and cold enough that a mile-and-a-half-long ice bridge is built across the frozen Témiscouata Lake in January and February. Like most villagers, Vallier, Nathalie, and their four young children—Jeanne, Romane, Henri, and Zélia—spend their days cross-country skiing through leafless maple forests, tobogganing down hillsides, and waiting for sugaring sea-

steel tanks inside Vallier's sugar shack.

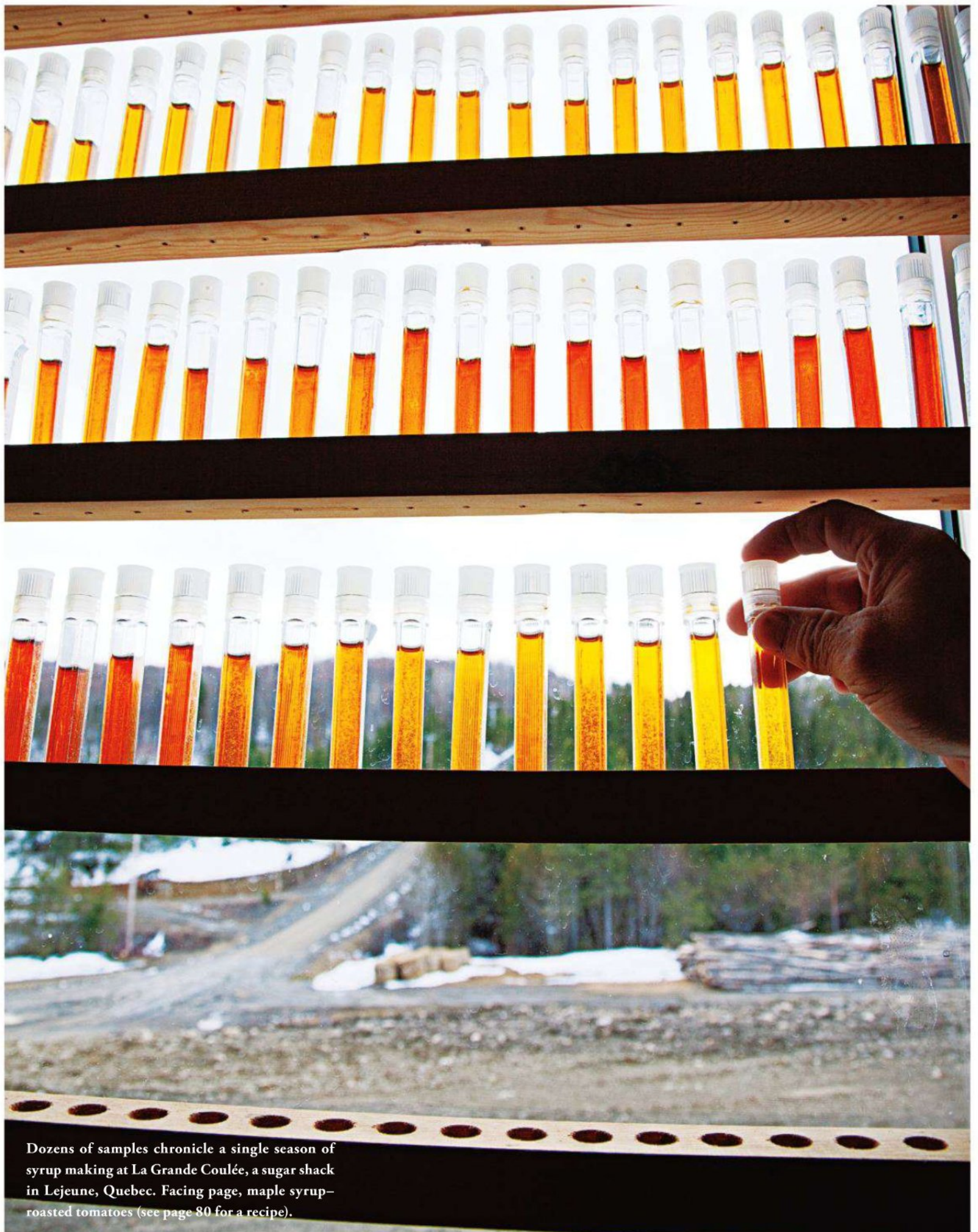
Early one morning, I join Nathalie in the shack, where the watery sap is collecting. She dips a tin cup into the clear fluid and hands it to me for a taste. I can detect only the faintest hint of sweetness. By law, Canadian maple syrup must be 66 percent sugar. But the sap is around 97 percent water and only about 2 percent sugar. (The remainder consists of minerals and amino acids, which will also contribute to the syrup's flavor.) The less sugar there is in the sap, the more boiling it requires. Yet (continued on page 79)



MAKING THE GRADE

Maple syrup varies widely in color, from pale gold to cola-brown. The Canadian maple grading system distinguishes among them by categorizing syrups according to levels of transparency—No. 1 is the lightest, and No. 3 the darkest. The practice likely dates back to the 19th century, when maple was considered a cheaper alternative to cane sugar, and the flaxen syrups (which most resembled sugar) were the most desirable. While the grades do not indicate the syrup's quality, they do reflect a difference in taste. The fair syrups—Canada No. 1—are divided into three subgrades. Extra Light is fresh and elemental, and the nectarlike version from La Ferme Martinette [1] imparts a gentle sweetness to yogurt or ice cream. Light syrup is fruity and floral—the example from Domaine Acer [2], with hints of peach and vanilla, would complement the tartness of baked apples. Medium, the most popular grade, possesses archetypal maple flavor. The bottle from Sucrerie de la Montagne [3], which tastes of caramel, is ideal for griddle fare like waffles and French toast. The next grade, Canada No. 2 Amber, is spicy and rich. While a drizzle of Labonté's [4] would taste great on pancakes, it adds surprising depth to marinades and baked goods. The most intensely flavored, Canada No. 3 Dark, is rarely available in stores (most ends up in commercial foods), but some producers do sell it. The coffee-brown syrup from Shady Maple Farm [5] lends molasses flavor to meaty dishes, such as chili and home-cured bacon. (See THE PANTRY, page 100, for ordering information.) —Leah Koenig





Dozens of samples chronicle a single season of syrup making at La Grande Coulée, a sugar shack in Lejeune, Quebec. Facing page, maple syrup-roasted tomatoes (see page 80 for a recipe).



(continued from page 74) it's not as simple as it sounds. The sugar content varies from day to day, peaking during the middle of the season. Even sap taken from the same forest tastes markedly different from one day to the next. Vallier keeps dozens of test tube samples throughout the season that together form an edible weather history of Auclair. "Oh yes," says Nathalie, pointing to a darkish test tube. "That was a really hot day, right before Easter."

Dressed in a white lab coat and a baseball cap, Vallier pours me a taste of syrup boiled from the first sap of early March, when the trees are still deep in snow. The pale-straw liquid tastes delicate and faintly woody. Vallier and Nathalie prefer the midseason syrup, which to me tastes like the pure essence of maple, with undertones of butter and cream. By the end of the season, when the trees are ready to bud, the syrup turns much deeper in

burner, a table for impromptu meals with family and friends. Locals without a shack of their own gather at those of neighbors and friends, drinking beer and syrup-sweetened coffee. The townspeople from the other side of Lake Témiscouata drive to St-Juste-du-Lac to enjoy lunch at a shack owned by Gilles and Nicole Chouinard. Everybody around Auclair knows the Chouinards; Gilles's family has been operating the shack for 54 years. "C'est chaleureux," says Janel Robert. The phrase has no direct translation into English. What Janel means is that the shack is warm—warmed by the heat of the evaporator but also by the warmth of the people who've gathered there.

The menu at the Chouinards' is pure *habitant*, cooked by family and neighbors dressed in denim and floral aprons. Plates arrive piled high with ham, beans, potatoes, and a salty heap of *oreilles de christ*—fried pork rinds. Eggs poach in a deep vat of syrup. Crêpes are dusted with maple sugar and drizzled with more syrup. Coffee percolates in tin pots on the wooden stove; the aroma mixes deliciously with the sweet steam from the evaporator while the Chouinards fry fluffy pancakes in lard and simmer sweet *grand-père* dumplings, airy nuggets of batter that will be bathed in syrup (see page 80 for a recipe). Many of the guests have been visiting the Chouinards for decades, and as they pour the fresh syrup out of old milk cans and pass plates of pickles around the long communal table, the gathering feels like a reunion.

Afterward, everyone heads outside for one final sweet: *tire*. Gilles boils maple syrup to the soft candy stage to create sticky maple

The Guide Quebec

Dinner for two with drinks and tip
Inexpensive Under \$20 **Moderate** \$20–\$80
Expensive Over \$80

Air Canada flies to Montreal and Quebec City. From New York, Chicago, or Boston, try Porter Air, a short-haul airline that offers business-class service at economy fares. Auclair, a village in the Bas-St-Laurent region, is about a three-hour drive from Quebec City and six hours from Montreal. Bas-St-Laurent is home to more trees than people; though tourism is limited, as are hotel and restaurant options, you'll find some excellent artisanal products to sample.

WHERE TO STAY

Auberge du Chemin Faisant

12 Vieux chemin, Cabano (877/954-9342; cheminfaisant.qc.ca). Rates: \$86–\$136 double. Check into this charming bed-and-breakfast run by chef Hugues Massey and his wife, Liette Fortin. If you're lucky, they might serve you a breakfast of Hugues's perfectly poached egg over maple-smoked mackerel. Dinner must be reserved in advance.

WHERE TO EAT

Domaine Acer

145 route du Vieux Moulin, Auclair (418/899-2825; domaineacer.com). Moderate. Before you purchase the fine maple products made here and sold in the gift shop, tour the maple syrup museum to get a sense of the history and science behind the syrup-making process.

Érablière Gilles et Nicole Chouinard

77 chemin Principal, St-Juste-du-Lac (418/899-1770). Moderate. For a taste of tradition, visit Nicole and Gilles Chouinard's sugar shack, just a few minutes outside of Auclair. You'll get a full meal with all the fixings for \$25.

Fou du Cochon et Scie

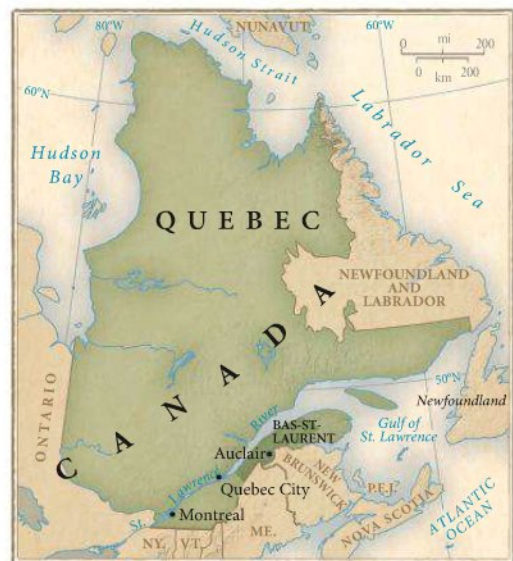
1660 rue de la Ferme, RR3, La Pocatière (418/856-3309; fouducochon.com). Inexpensive. En route to Auclair, buy some organic dry-cured sausages from Nathalie Joannette and Samuel Gaudet at their specialty food store, Fou du cochon et Scie. The one made with hazelnuts, cured in a maple-wood cold room, is a standout.

Fromagerie Le Détour

100 route Transcanadienne, Notre-Dame-du-Lac (418/899-7000; fromagerieledetour.ca). Moderate. Fromagerie Le Détour is the region's best cheese maker and the winner of many awards. Grey Owl, an ash-ripened goat cheese, is just one of the many excellent options.

Poissonnerie Lauzier

57 avenue Morel, Kamouraska (418/492-7988; kamouraska.ca). Moderate. Stop at Poissonnerie Lauzier in Kamouraska for a sandwich of sturgeon or eel; both are fished just minutes away in the St. Lawrence River and smoked over maple wood. —S.C.



ONCE THE FIRST SAP HAS BEEN TAPPED AND THE FIRST SYRUP BOILED, IT'S TIME FOR CELEBRATION

color. The flavor is nuttier, more chocolatey and complex, even slightly bitter.

ONCE THE FIRST SAP HAS been tapped and the first syrup boiled, it's time for celebration—something this luxuriously flavored must be eaten right away—so even the humblest sugar shack has some kind of makeshift kitchen. An old wood stove, a counter with a coffee maker and an electric

Nathalie Decaigny and Vallier Robert, the husband-and-wife owners of Domaine Acer, stroll through a maple forest in Auclair, Quebec.

taffy, the same way he's been doing it year after year; one of his sons pours three stripes of the molten syrup onto a long tray of fresh snow. Chaos ensues. Armed with short wooden sticks, young and old jostle for position at the trough, rolling up the taffy before it hardens into a lollipop. Everyone jokes with a familial ease, lingering long after the last *tire* is rolled, while children clamber up the shrinking snowbanks and hide behind the maple trees. It's impossible not to smile. Nothing matches the high spirits of a well-fed group of northerners, standing together and soaking in the warm spring sun. 🍷

Carré Érable et Noix

(Maple Squares with Walnuts)

Serves 8–10

Serve these chewy dessert squares in shallow bowls, with a pitcher of cream to be poured over the top.

- 8 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed and chilled, plus more for pan
- 1 cup plus 2 tbsp. flour, plus more for pan
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus $\frac{3}{4}$ cup maple sugar (see page 100)
- 1 cup maple syrup
- 1 cup chopped walnuts
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten

Heat oven to 350°. Butter and flour an 8" square baking pan; set aside. In a food processor, process butter, 1 cup flour, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup maple sugar until combined; transfer to pan and press evenly into bottom. Bake until lightly browned, about 15 minutes. Whisk remaining flour and maple sugar with maple syrup, walnuts, salt, and eggs in a bowl; pour over baked crust. Bake until filling is golden brown and set, 30–35 minutes.

Tarte au Sucre d'Érable

(Maple Sugar Pie)

Serves 8

When making this dessert, home cook Nathalie Decaigny folds any extra dough over the side of the pan for an extra-thick crust and serves the tart warm with whipped cream.

- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups flour
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups plus 2 tbsp. maple sugar (see page 100)
- 5 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups heavy cream
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup potato starch

1. In a food processor, process flour, 2 tbsp. maple sugar, butter, $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt, and egg until a dough forms; transfer to a work surface and form into a flat disk. Wrap dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour. Roll dough to $\frac{1}{8}$ " thickness; transfer to a 9" pie plate and refrigerate.

2. Heat oven to 400°. In a food processor, process remaining maple sugar and salt with heavy cream, milk, and potato starch until smooth. Pour into lined pie plate and drape edges of dough over filling; bake for 10 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375° and continue baking until crust is golden brown and filling is set, 20–25 minutes.

Tomate Confite au Sirop d'Érable

(Maple Syrup–Roasted Tomatoes)

Serves 4–6

Here, maple syrup intensifies the sweetness of tomatoes. Serve these with toothpicks as an appetizer or on salads, pizza, and pastas.



Wild rice soup with maple syrup

- 16 cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
- 2 tbsp. maple syrup
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme, stemmed
- 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Heat oven to 250°. Arrange tomato halves cut side up on an aluminum foil-lined baking sheet. Whisk together syrup, oil, thyme, garlic, and salt and pepper in a bowl and then drizzle over tomatoes. Bake until tomatoes are half-dried and concentrated, 3–4 hours.

Soupe aux Champignons et Riz Sauvage à l'Érable

(Wild Rice Soup with Maple Syrup)

Serves 6

This rich, creamy soup is balanced by the addition of hearty grains and sweet maple syrup.

- 6 cups chicken stock
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup wild rice
- 1 cup finely chopped shallots
- 2 cups half-and-half
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour
- 2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. freshly ground black pepper, plus more to taste
- 1 cup thinly sliced button mushrooms
- 2 tbsp. maple syrup
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Thinly sliced chives, for serving

In a 4-qt. saucepan, bring stock and rice to a boil over medium-high heat. Cover and cook, stirring, for 40 minutes. Add shallots and continue cooking until rice is tender, 5–10 minutes. In a small bowl, whisk half-and-half, flour, thyme, and pepper; whisk into soup. Add mushrooms and cook, stirring, until soup thickens, about 15 minutes. Stir in maple syrup, salt, and pepper; divide soup between 6 serving bowls. Garnish with chives.

Crêpes au Sucre et au Sirop d'Érable

(Crêpes with Maple Sugar and Syrup)

Serves 12

These crêpes, rolled up with maple sugar and



Maple squares with walnuts

syrup while still warm, make an indulgent breakfast.

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups milk
- 10 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 1 egg
- 1 cup flour
- 3 tbsp. sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking powder
- 6 tbsp. maple sugar (see page 100)
- 12 tbsp. maple syrup

In a medium bowl, whisk milk, 4 tbsp. butter, and egg. In a large bowl, whisk flour, sugar, and baking powder; add milk mixture and whisk until smooth. Set aside for 10 minutes. Grease a 10" nonstick skillet with $\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp. butter and heat over medium-high heat. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup batter; swirl pan to spread batter. Cook crêpe, turning once, until browned, 1–2 minutes. Transfer to a warm plate and repeat with remaining butter and batter. To serve, sprinkle $\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp. maple sugar onto each crêpe and drizzle with 1 tbsp. maple syrup. Roll up into a cylinder and serve immediately.

Grand-pères

(Maple Syrup Dumplings)

Serves 6

These rich dumplings are an ideal vehicle for syrup. Vallier Robert uses butter in his grand-pères, but the Chouinards use the lard drippings from their oreilles de christ (fried pork rinds).

- $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups maple syrup
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour
- $4\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter, frozen
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk

Bring syrup and $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups water to a boil in a 6-qt. Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Meanwhile, whisk flour, baking powder, and salt in a bowl; set aside. Grate butter on large holes of a box grater into flour and toss to coat; add milk and stir with a fork until dough forms. When syrup mixture reaches a boil, use a spoon to drop large clumps of dough into syrup. Cover pot; simmer until dumplings are cooked through, 10–15 minutes. Spoon dumplings and sauce into 6 bowls and serve.

When I tasted it I thought I had died and gone to Heaven.

It is the best sauce I have ever tasted!

Judith Vergara Arrington, Oxford PA

I have found the best jarred or otherwise,
Marinara Sauce in my life.

Kerrigan Mahan, Morro Bay CA

I was raised on homemade sauce... no jarred sauce has
come close to homemade until yours...

Fantastic!!!

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The Light of Morning

In a town in northwest Haiti, putting good food on the table is both a serious business and a reassuring ritual

By Jocelyn C. Zuckerman Photographs by Ramin Talaie





Ideal

Bar

restaurant

59



The truckers, the priests, the foreigners and NGO folks who rumble through this dusty outpost—they all turn up at Madame's Ideal Bar Restaurant at one point or another. It's a comfort in a place with few of them

THE ROOSTERS in Gros-Morne start their screeching around four in the morning, which might explain why life in this Haitian town is already well under way by six. Motorbikes are zipping down the rubble-strewn roads, their drivers honking tinny horns as they navigate around pedestrians and potholes and donkeys. Schoolchildren march by wearing backpacks and neat uniforms; women balancing giant bundles on their heads gossip en route to market.

I've come to this part of Haiti to learn about the mango industry—what many see as a bright spot on otherwise grim economic and environmental fronts—but what I mostly hear about is Madame Ti Roche. The deputy mayor? He eats at her Ideal Bar Restaurant whenever his wife isn't around to cook. The head of the region's leading mango cooperative? Sunday nights invariably find him picking his way through a plate of Madame's chile-flecked *poisson rouge*. The truckers, the priests, the foreigners and NGO folks who rumble through this dusty outpost—they all turn up at Madame's at one point or another. It's a comfort in a place with few of them.

When I flew to Haiti to do some reporting just after last year's earthquake, I'd expected things to be rough. But returning this time, I had allowed myself hope for some improvement. On the four-hour

drive from Port-au-Prince to Gros-Morne, though, the misery pretty much assaults me at every turn. There are the shantytowns materializing on the hills outside of the capital, slapped-together communities of cardboard and bedsheets and bright-blue foreign-issue tarpaulins. There is mountain beyond mountain denuded of plant life; endless stretches of road bordered by nothing but dirt and debris; plastic bottle-clogged rivers; men far too old for work, sweating beneath the weight of medieval-looking carts.

But there is also the sun-sweetened papaya I pick up in Saint-Marc, and the Madame Francis mangoes that will become the staple of my diet over the next few days. Wildly aromatic, they are also intensely juicy and hopelessly stringy—hard to eat, but impossible to resist. In Gros-Morne (or Gwo-Mòn, in Creole—Big Mountain, in any case), I wander the open-air market, where women sit beneath plastic canopies minding bundles of cilantro, thyme, and parsley, little pyramids of oranges, passion fruits, and mirlitons. From a young girl I buy a gloriously sticky cluster of peanuts and cane syrup vibrant with the zing of fresh ginger. Women motion for me to inspect their garlic and shallots, their plastic basins, enamel plates, and preworn blouses, in a way that suggests they expect something from me, but not really.

thrown open and she and her cooks are out back at work. Shuffling around in canvas sneakers, short braids poking out from beneath a jaunty cap, Madame Ti Roche moves from the braziers of the open-air kitchen to the shadows of the enclosed one, checking on the contents of various saucepans sitting atop glowing coals in wrought-iron stands. She shaves beets with a sharp knife, dropping the scraps onto an upturned pot lid, while another cook peels plantains and hunks of snowy cassava. An older woman in a ragged dress and head kerchief stirs a sizzling pot of *epis*, the Haitian flavor base of garlic, shallots, and chiles, while a fourth breaks down a goat carcass into bite-size chunks. A girl of seven or eight in a Dora the Explorer nightie cuts onions by a storage shed housing a pile of plantains and three noisy chickens.

The conversation is minimal, though when I ask how to make the *mayi moulen* (cornmeal porridge with pinto beans) simmering in one of the pots, the younger cook patiently walks me through the recipe, my friend translating from her Haitian Creole. Madame's place has neither electricity nor running water, but it's one serious operation: in the height of mango season, when the truckers descend on Gros-Morne, the Ideal Bar Restaurant will send out scores of plates in a day.

Chatting on the dusty stoop out

Sheriline and Magda Petit-Homme at Ideal Bar Restaurant in Gros-Morne, Haiti. Previous pages: women in the town's open-air market.

FOOD SEEMS TO dictate the rhythm of the day. By the time I arrive at Madame's at seven in the morning, the doors have been

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My *poisson rouge*, a whole red snapper from the seaside town of Gonaïves, swims in a brick-colored sauce rich with garlic and the heat of Scotch bonnets

front with Madame's husband, Wesnel Timothe, I learn that she hasn't always been a cook. She and Timothe grew up together in Gros-Morne but left in 1978 to find work in Port-au-Prince. After saving what they'd made at the textile and shoe factories that employed them, says Timothe, a burly man in his 50s with a skinny gray mustache, they moved back home and found work as a seamstress and a tailor. They opened their restaurant in 1984, posting a menu not unlike the handwritten sheet you'll find taped to the Caribbean-pink wall today: *poulets creole* (spicy, citrusy stewed chicken), *cabrit* (goat's-head stew), and a half dozen other classic Haitian dishes.

But life was better then, says Timothe. "We used to have electricity. Then it became sporadic, and now we hardly have it at all." People also had faucets in their yards. Now he and Madame, who haven't had a tap since 1986, have to pay for water—and for someone to deliver it. In addition to helping run the restaurant, Timothe drives a truck and farms, but he and his wife and six kids still have trouble making ends meet. "We do our best," he shrugs.

It isn't easy. Though Gros-Morne is part of Haiti's fertile Artibonite region, this place faces the same environmental problems as the rest of the country. (For the past several months it's also been battling a cholera epidemic.) Whereas in 1923, 60 percent of Haiti was forested, by 2006 trees covered just 2 percent of the land. "Gros-Morne used to be very green," Deputy Mayor

Ruben Beaugé tells me later in the morning. "But when people wake up and don't have money for food or school fees, they chop a mango tree and sell it for charcoal. Or they sell it to a dry cleaner or a distillery." Despite reforestation efforts and the introduction of solar cookers, Haitians still rely on wood and charcoal as primary sources of fuel, and the impact has been devastatingly apparent.

And then came the earthquake that rocked the capital last January. In the days following the disaster, Gros-Morne's population swelled by more than 5,000, says Beaugé, taxing the city's limited resources even further. "People who hadn't been back for 15 years have now come home," he says. (Among them is Madame's niece Sheriline Petit-Homme, who jumped from the second floor of her Port-au-Prince school and was hospitalized for eight days before decamping to the countryside, where she now helps out at the restaurant.) The World Food Programme showed up with a convoy, but after locals rioted, donors stayed away. "People are starving here," Beaugé says.

He is a regular at Madame Ti Roche's, and he envisions a day when more locals will be able to appreciate her talent. "Most people here can't pay 200 gourdes [five dollars] for a plate of food," he says. Even so, today the 20-seat place is filling up by noon, as men drop their weary bodies into the molded-plastic chairs. (Other than the staff, I'm the only female in the place.) I'm trying to work out the logic behind the products displayed on the shelves—laundry detergent, straws, cornflakes,

canned sports shakes, Bermudez, El Dorado rum—when a teenager in cutoff denim shorts and patent-leather flip-flops approaches to tell me what's available. (The posted menu represents the Platonic ideal of what might be on offer on any given day.) Staticky West African music floats up from a transistor radio; a faint breeze blows the ivory curtains in and out of the open door. Eventually she returns and sets a plate on the plastic place mat.

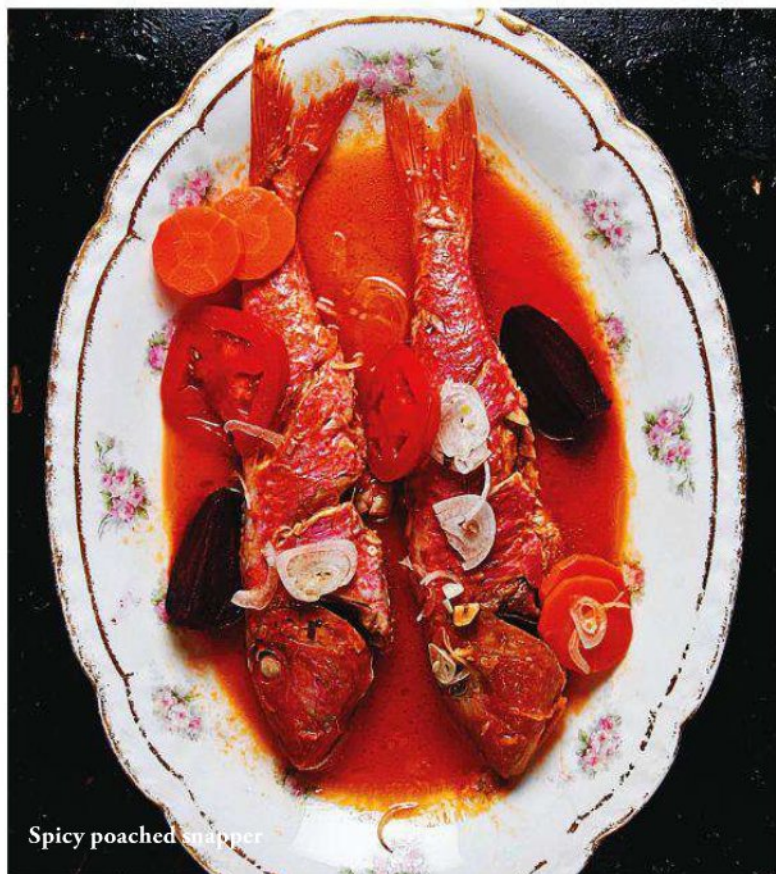
My *poisson rouge*, a whole red snapper from the nearby seaside town of Gonaïves, swims in a brick-colored sauce rich with garlic and the heat of Scotch bonnets; it comes with hunger-busting mounds of rice and cornmeal mush and dense cylinders of boiled plantain and cassava. The preacher at the next table stops dismantling his cell phone the moment his goat's-head stew is set down, and he doesn't look up until his plate is clean. In fact, with food on all the tables, conversation in the place has come to a halt.

Hours later, as the sun begins to ease its way behind the mountains, and smoke from cooking fires rises in the distance, Madame and her crew are still at it. The women at the market have begun to pack up their wares and head for home; the men are throwing back beers in the local shipping-container-cum-bar. By ten, the staff of Ideal Bar Restaurant will finally clamp shut the padlock and step into the moonlit night. The roosters will be crowing before they know it. 

A cook at Ideal Bar Restaurant in Gros-Morne, Haiti.







Spicy poached snapper

Poisson Rouge

(Spicy Poached Snapper)

Serves 2–4

This flavorful poached fish is topped with a salad of fresh and boiled vegetables to balance the piquant broth.

- 2 1-lb. red snappers, scaled
- 1 cup thinly sliced shallots
- ½ cup fresh lime juice
- 1 tbsp. finely chopped scallion
- ½ tsp. mustard powder
- 1 sprig thyme
- 1 Scotch bonnet chile, split
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ¼ cup canola oil
- 6 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- Boiled sliced carrots and beets
- Sliced tomatoes

1. Score sides of fish; place in a shallow dish. Whisk together half the shallots, lime juice, scallion, mustard, thyme, chile, salt, and pepper in a bowl and pour over fish; marinate 30 minutes.

2. Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add tomato paste and

cook until it begins to caramelize, about 2 minutes. Add 1 cup water and bring to a boil; cook, stirring, until almost evaporated, about 8–10 minutes. Remove fish from marinade and set aside; add marinade and sugar to skillet and cook, stirring, until shallots are soft, 4–5 minutes. Add fish and ¾ cup water and cover skillet; cook, turning once, until fish is cooked through, 8–12 minutes. Transfer fish to a large serving platter. Season cooking liquid with salt and pepper and pour through a fine strainer over fish. Garnish with remaining shallots; serve with carrots, beets, and tomatoes.

Poulet Creole

(Haitian Stewed Chicken)

Serves 6–8

This traditional poultry dish owes its bright, spicy kick to a tart marinade of lime juice and fiery Scotch bonnet peppers.

- 1 3–4-lb. chicken, cut into 8 pieces
- 1 tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 scallions, roughly chopped
- 2 sprigs parsley
- 1 sprig thyme, stemmed
- 1 Scotch bonnet chile, split
- 1 green bell pepper, stemmed,



Haitian stewed chicken

- seeded, and thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- 1 large yellow onion, halved and thinly sliced
- ½ red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and thinly sliced
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste

1. Place chicken in a shallow baking dish. Purée salt, garlic, scallions, parsley, thyme, Scotch bonnet chile, half the green bell peppers, and ½ cup water in a food processor and pour over chicken. Chill for 4 hours.

2. Heat oil in a 6-qt. Dutch oven

over medium-high heat. Scrape marinade from chicken; reserve marinade. Add chicken to pot and cook, turning once, until browned, about 10 minutes. Transfer chicken to a plate and set aside. Add remaining green bell peppers, onions, and red bell peppers to pot, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, until soft, 8–10 minutes. Add tomato paste and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Return chicken to pot, along with reserved marinade and 1 cup water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium-low, and cover pot slightly; cook, stirring occasionally, until chicken is tender, 25–30 minutes. Remove from heat and season with salt and pepper.

Fruit and Fire

You could substitute another kind of chile for the Scotch bonnets called for in these recipes, but it's worth seeking out the real thing. A variety of the species *Capsicum chinense*, the Scotch bonnet is so closely related to the habanero that the two are often confused. Typically red, orange, or yellow when ripe, the Scotch bonnet is shorter and rounder than the habanero; some say it got its name because of its resemblance to a Scottish tam-o'-shanter hat. It is one of the hottest chiles around—as much as 60 times as hot as a jalapeño—but it's got flavor as well as heat. Widely used in both Haiti and Jamaica, the Scotch bonnet has a distinctive floral, fruity character perfectly suited to the spicy-sweet curries and citrus marinades of the Caribbean.

—Beth Kracklauer





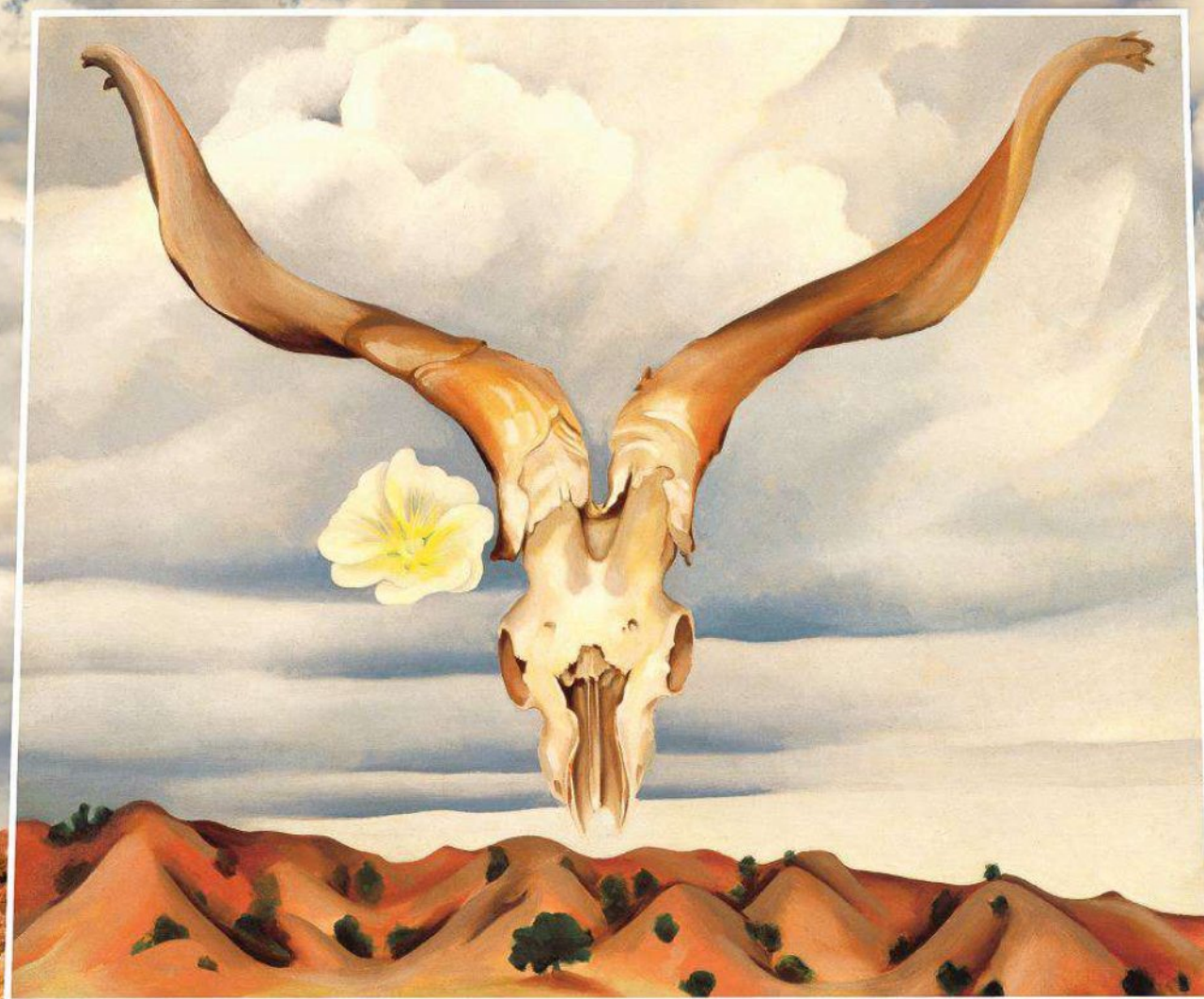
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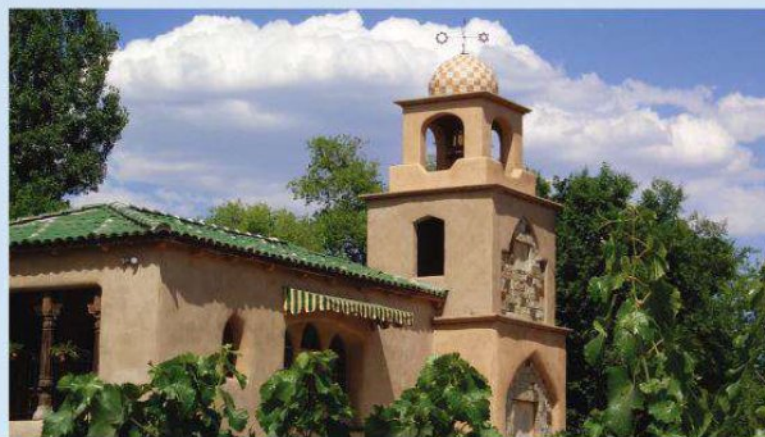


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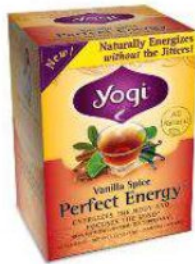
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On Tuesday, December 7, SAVEUR hosted its second annual Potluck Holiday. This year, the event was held at The Cooper Square Hotel Penthouse in New York City. With Manhattan's sweeping skyline as the backdrop, attendees toasted 2010 and mingled with the 13 incredible chefs from around the country.

SAVEUR gathered the best chefs nationwide to serve their treasured traditional fares. Guests feasted on braised short ribs, stewed octopus, goat chili, eggplant parmesan and more! Sponsors of this annual event included Moon Mountain Vodka, Newton Vineyard Wines, Harpoon Brewery Beer, Smart Water, Ghirardelli Chocolate, Alexia Spicy Sweet Potato Fries, Dolce Gusto Coffee, Brizo, Rodelle Vanilla, and Kerrygold Cheese.

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IN THE SAVEUR KITCHEN

Discoveries and Techniques from Our Favorite Room in the House » Edited by Todd Coleman



Cherry on Top

AS WE TESTED cannoli and *zeppole* recipes for this issue's feature on Sicily (see page 43), we made a discovery we haven't stopped talking about since. Luscious, intensely flavorful *amarena* cherries, the garnish called for in both recipes, aren't, truth be told, even Sicilian. They're a product of Emilia-Romagna, where local wild cherries—a fleshy, dark red variety with a flavor that's both sweet and scrumptiously bitter (or *amare* in Italian)—are preserved in a rich syrup made from the juice of the same fruit. *SAVEUR* contributing editor Nick Malgieri recommended the *amarena* in place of ordinary candied cherries, and we've been finding no end of excuses to dip into the jar—itself a thing of beauty, from the Italian company Fabbri, which has produced the preserved cherries for nearly a century. We're drizzling the syrup over pancakes. We're dropping the cherries into champagne. On ice cream, in a *clafouti*, even in a glass of seltzer—what luxury! —Beth Kracklauer

Whip Smart

Tapioca pudding always has a delightful texture thanks to the little tapioca pearls in it. But the latest version developed in our test kitchen (see page 30 for a recipe) is off the charts: miraculously light and frothy, with enough body so that the pearls stay aloft rather than sinking to the bottom, as they sometimes do. The secret? A cunning boost of meringue folded into the custardy pudding once it has cooled. Making a meringue that will function as a sort of airy architecture for the dessert isn't difficult, but it does require your full attention. What you're trying to achieve as you whisk the egg whites and the sugar is twofold. First, you want to beat in air until it unwinds some of the tightly wound egg proteins, which will bond together around bubbles of

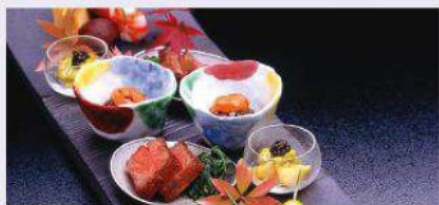


air. Then, you want to make sure the new structure remains intact; that's where the sugar comes in. It will dissolve and form a syrup that will coat and reinforce the unfurled proteins. Success comes down, in large part, to when you introduce the sugar. If you add it too early you'll end up whisking and whisking without gaining any volume. For the lightest, highest meringue, wait until soft peaks just begin to form in the egg whites—that indicates that the air bubbles are close to the size you want to capture—then add the sugar, and continue working the meringue to the point at which stiff peaks form. That means the bubbles have subdivided to form a tighter structure that will hold together in the pudding, making it the fluffiest you've ever eaten. —B.K.

TODD COLEMAN (2)

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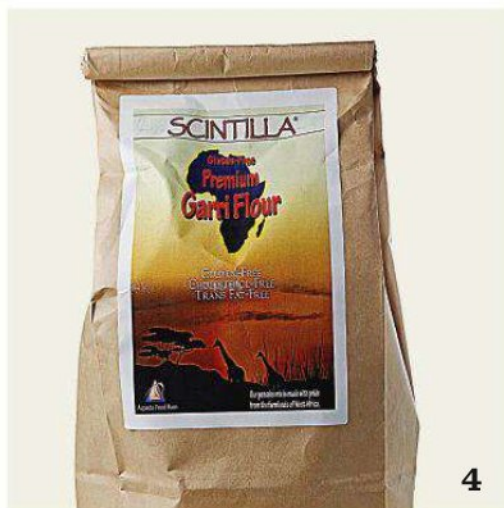
The Cassava Variations

RESearch AND RECIPE TESTING for this issue's story about cassava ("Taking Root," page 26) left us very much in awe of the tropical tuberous root. After all, it contains twice the starch of your average potato—and starch not only accounts for about 75 percent of people's caloric intake worldwide, it's also a fundamental element of cooking, one that can mean the difference between watery and thick, mushy and crunchy, mere subsistence and food that's truly satisfying. Cassava starch contains less fat and protein than, say, wheat flour or cornstarch, which means its flavor is more neutral; it also thickens more quickly, which makes it a handy ingredient for adding to a preparation at the last minute. Cooks around the world have found different ways to use cassava, and so it's available for purchase in a wide variety of forms. The one most familiar to North American cooks, **tapioca [1]**, is the pure starch extracted from cassava by pulping, filtering, and centrifug-

ing. Tapioca comes in a fine powder, coarser granules, or the pearl form found in tapioca pudding (see page 30 for a recipe), all of which are used to thicken gravies and sauces. Many cooks prefer tapioca to other kinds of starch because it tends to bring an attractive, glossy sheen to otherwise dull-looking preparations. **Farinha de mandioca [2]** is made by soaking and grinding cassava, then drying the pulp to produce a coarse meal. If it's labeled *torrada*, it means the cassava meal has already been toasted; the untoasted kind is usually labeled *branca* (white). Cooks in Brazil use both types to add body to all kinds of dishes; cooked in butter or palm oil, *farinha* becomes *farofa*, a condiment kept on Brazilian tables for spooning into any dish that could use some body or crunch (see page 30 for a recipe). In Spanish-speaking Latin America, cassava is called yuca and is thinly sliced and deep-fried to make crisp **yuca chips [3]**, a popular snack. **Garri [4]** is a cassava meal made in West Africa via a process



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similar to the one used to make Brazilian *farinha de mandioca*. *Garri* is allowed to ferment before drying, which gives it a pleasant sour flavor. It comes in three grades: rough, which is sometimes soaked and mixed with sugar and evaporated milk to make a rich pudding; medium, which is used in much the same way that Brazilian *farinha* is, to thicken various dishes; and smooth, a gluten-free alternative to wheat flour (with a similar consistency) that can be used to make pancakes or breads. Cooks from Central and South America to the Caribbean, tropical Africa, and South and Southeast Asia prize the tuber itself for its mellow, nutty flavor and silky texture, and you can find it in markets fresh, **frozen** [5], or **canned** [6]. Cassava is delicious boiled and dressed with a spicy condiment like a Latin American *mojo* (see page 30 for a recipe) or a Southeast Asian *sambal*. The tuber also has a wonderful capacity to release its starch into a stew, soup, or casserole, adding body and

a velvety consistency. Brazilian **polvilho** [7] is a fine tapioca starch that comes in a fermented form (labeled *azedo*, or sour) and an unfermented one (labeled *doce*, or sweet). It's used to make puffy biscuits called *biscoitos* and pastries like the airy, cheesy *pão de queijo* (see page 30 for a recipe). In Guyana and a few other places in the southern Caribbean, **cassareep** [8] is made from juice extracted from grated cassava that's boiled down along with sugar, chiles, and warming spices like clove and cinnamon to produce a thick, intense, and inky syrup. *Cassareep* not only has an appealing, bittersweet flavor, it also has powerful preservative properties. It's a key ingredient in Guyanese pepper pot, a meaty stew traditionally kept on the stove for years at a time, with fresh ingredients and more *cassareep* introduced continually. It's an ancient recipe, a legacy of the Amerindian people who first cultivated cassava and recognized what an astonishingly versatile ingredient it can be. —B.K.

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Maple syrup enhances many foods, but it's also terrific in cocktails. Whereas simple syrup is simply sweet, maple lends flavor, richness, and nostalgia. "People respond to it," says Brad Farran, head bartender at New York City's Clover Club, "because many of us grew up eating it." He uses the syrup to complement the roundness of apple brandy or to contrast aquavit's traditional caraway flavor. But the syrup's best bar partner may be rye. "Rye tends to be aged in oak, so both are woodsy," Farran notes, "but the syrup adds depth." With citrus juice, they make up what he calls a "holy trinity of flavors" in his Prospect Park Sour (see a recipe at right): spicy, rich, and with a balancing acidity. The final touch, herbaceous amaro, brings out the syrup's vegetal qualities. The result is at once approachable and complex. Farran likes a midseason amber syrup, which he warms to room temperature so that it mixes evenly in the drinks. —*Betsy Andrews*



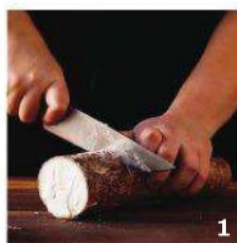
Maple Rye Sour

Makes 1 cocktail

The recipe for this sweet-tart drink is based on the Prospect Park Sour, created by Brad Farran at the Clover Club in Brooklyn, New York.

- 2 oz. rye whiskey, preferably Rittenhouse
- ½ oz. fresh lemon juice
- ½ oz. fresh orange juice
- ¼ oz. maple syrup
- ¼ oz. Luxardo Amaro Abano liqueur
- Strip of orange peel, to garnish

Combine whiskey, juices, syrup, and liqueur in a cocktail shaker, fill with ice, and cover; shake vigorously until chilled. Strain into a chilled sour glass and garnish with orange peel twist.



Cut to the Core

Cassava, the third most widely consumed carbohydrate in the world, cooks similarly to potatoes, green plantains, and other starchy produce. However, its preparation is slightly more involved. On the surface, the textured brown peel of the gnarly tuber looks like tree bark and is covered in wax, which helps preserve the very perishable root. The good news is, the daunting outer layer is in fact soft and easy to remove. The actual challenge in preparing cassava lies in the tough, fibrous channel called a cordon, which runs through the core of the vegetable and must be cut out before cooking it (the cordon never becomes tender and can splinter). To break down cassava for cooking, begin by [1] cutting off the tapered ends to reveal

where the cordon begins, then divide the root into manageable lengths, approximately the size of a large russet potato. [2] Stand the segments up on their flat ends and, using a large chef's knife, cut away the peel of the cassava in strips, rotating the cylinder as you go until it's completely peeled. [3] Halve the cassava cylinder lengthwise to expose the core. Continue cutting the cassava lengthwise into wedges, making sure to cut through the core. [4] Using your knife, slice off the inner corner of each wedge to remove the woody flesh and discard. Now that the cordon is removed, it's safe to cook the cassava like any other vegetable, whether you choose to boil, sauté, fry, or roast it. —*Ben Mims*

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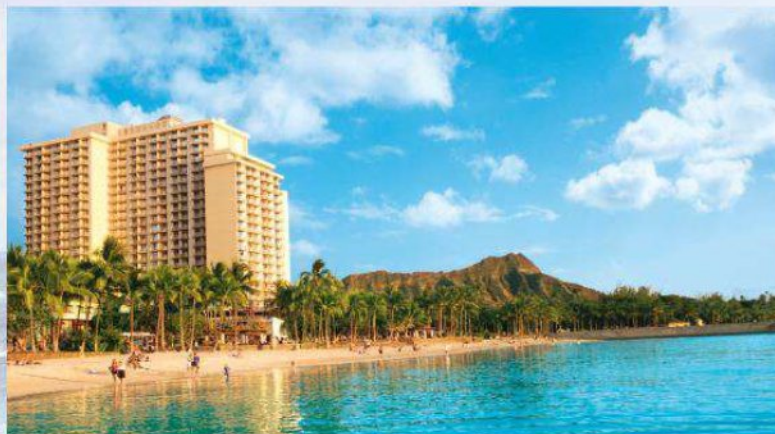
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HRC EVENTS

MARCH 9, 2011

James Beard House, New York City

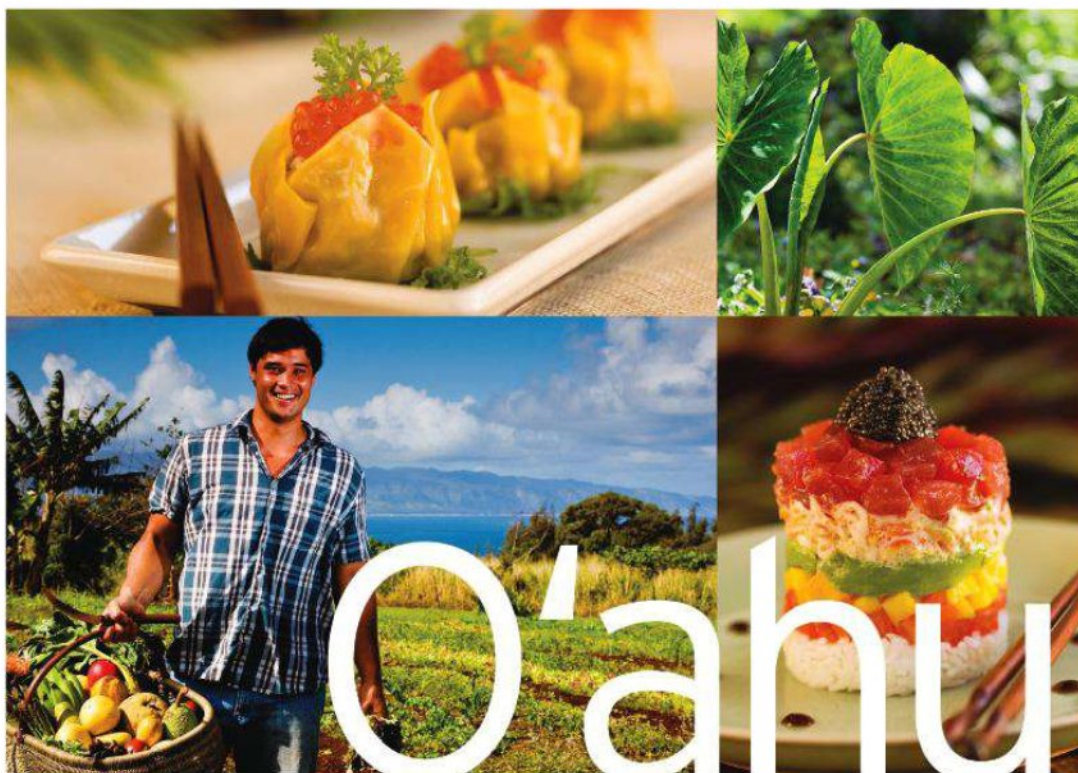
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Hawai'i Restaurant Association's
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www.hawaiiregionalcuisine.com



DISCOVER TODAY'S HAWAI'I REGIONAL CUISINE

Twenty years ago, a culinary revolution began in Hawai'i. Tired of using frozen fish, meats, and vegetables delivered from the mainland, and preparing them "Continental" style, a dozen European- and American-trained chefs banded together and transformed the way we eat and think about food in the 50th state.

These culinary mavericks worked with local farmers, fishermen, and ranchers to get fresh products onto their tables. They perused the pages of seed catalogues with farmers and committed to vegetables and fruits before they were planted; they took whatever product was brought to their kitchen door and encouraged more. They scoured fish auctions and experimented with Hawai'i's vast supply of freshly caught fish; they visited ranches and committed to using local goat cheese, lamb, beef, and veal. Fresh food was their focus.

Then the chefs recalled what was being served in their employee cafeterias: the food the Hawai'i-born and raised chefs grew up eating. They began to create menus inspired by the cuisine of Hawai'i's ethnic population, a mélange of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Portuguese, American and European people. The flavors, textures, and cooking techniques began to mingle with the bounty of fresh local ingredients and Hawai'i Regional Cuisine (HRC) was born. HRC is an exciting cuisine, boldly flavored with

the exotic ingredients, spices, herbs, and heat of Asian kitchens, mellowed by the cooking techniques of haute cuisine. For the first few years HRC was almost exclusively found in fine dining restaurants and hotels. But the concept has thrived, evolved, and spread to just about every restaurant kitchen in the state. Fast-food places like Zippy's feature island-grown-beef burgers; sports bar Side Street Inn serves island-grown Nalo greens and basil pesto-crusting ahi; Alan Wong's regularly features menus where just about everything is locally sourced. And the locavore movement has inspired home cooks too, who now seek fresh products at flourishing farmers' markets throughout the state.

Today's HRC speaks of Hawai'i's melting pot—with Southeast Asian, Mediterranean, Indian, Mexican, and other world cuisines added to the mix. With an expanding roster of top chefs who never lack for new creative combinations and an ever-increasing diversity of fresh ingredients, the culturally rich food of Hawai'i today is sophisticated, diverse, and delectable. It's a world-class cuisine worthy of discovery with an endless array of palate-pleasing adventures.

For more information about the island of O'ahu, Hawai'i Regional Cuisine and O'ahu restaurant recommendations, go to www.visit-oahu.com

THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

In producing the stories for this issue, we discovered ingredients and information too good to keep to ourselves. Please feel free to raid our pantry!

BY BEN MIMS

Fare

For our favorite wood-roasted coffees, buy **Wood-Fire Roasted's Ethiopia (Yrgacheffe)** from Wood-Fire Roasted Coffee Company (\$16 for a 1-pound bag; 775/856-2033; woodfire roasted.com), **Millar's Sunset** from Millar's Wood Roasted Coffee (\$16.95 for a 1-pound bag; 360/686-3643; millarscoffee.com), **Mr. Espresso's Organic Bolivia** from Mr. Espresso (\$9.40 for a 12-ounce bag; 510/287-5200; mrespresso.com), **Summer-moon's Inferno** from Summermoon Wood Fired Coffee (\$12 for a 12-ounce bag; 512/804-1665; woodfiredcoffee.com), and **Matt's Ethiopia Amaro Gayo Natural** from Matt's Wood Roasted Organic Coffee (\$11.75 for a 12-ounce bag; 207/660-3333; mattscoffee.com). To try king cakes when visiting New Orleans during Carnival season, stop by: **Hi-Do Bakery** (441 Terry Parkway, Terrytown; 504/366-6555), **Gambino's Bakery and Café** (4821 Veterans Memorial Boulevard, Metairie; 504/885-7500), **New Orleans Cake Cafe & Bakery** (2440 Chartres Street; 504/943-0010), **Dong Phuong Oriental Bakery** (14207 Chef Menteur Highway; 504/254-0214), **La Boulangerie** (4526 Magazine Street; 504/269-3777), and **Sucre** (3025 Magazine Street; 504/520-8311). Visit **Yerba Buena** restaurant (23 Avenue A, New York City; 212/529-2919) to try the hearts of palm fries. To make hearts of palm fries (see page 20), use **canned hearts of palm**, available

from Amazon.com (\$25.74 for three 28-ounce cans; amazon.com). Order **jarred hearts of palm**, available from MyBrands.com (\$12.58 for two 14.4-ounce jars; 888/281-6400; mybrands.com). Contact One Earth Gourmet (800/863-2784; oneearthgourmet.com) for **fresh, vacuum-packed hearts of palm**. For our favorite Japanese whiskeys, buy **Suntory's Yamazaki Single Malt 12-Year-Old Whisky** (\$41.99 for a 750-milliliter bottle), **Suntory's Yamazaki Single Malt 18-Year-Old Whisky** (\$115 for a 750-milliliter bottle), and **Suntory's "Hibiki" 12-Year-Old Blended Whisky**, (\$67.99 for a 750-milliliter bottle) from Astor Wines & Spirits (212/674-7500; astorwines.com). To make the hibiscus rose vesper (see page 24), contact Thirteenth Colony Distilleries (229/924-3310; 13colony.net) to find a source for its **Plantation handcrafted vodka** and contact A. B. Smeby Bittering Co. (646/554-6318; absmebybitteringco.com) to inquire about purchasing its **hibiscus rose bitters**.

Classic

To make the northern Vietnamese-style beef and rice-noodle soup (see page 41), purchase **black cardamom** (\$3.99 for a 1-ounce bag) and **star anise** (\$4.99 for a 1-ounce jar), available from Kalustyan's (800/352-3451; kalustyans.com), **Viet Huong's 3 Crabs fish sauce**, available from eFoodDepot.com (\$4.79 for a 24-ounce bottle; 866/256-9210; efooddepot.com), **dried scallops**, available from Hsu's Ginseng Enterprises (\$26 for an 8-ounce bag; 800/826-1577; hsluginseng.com), and **banh pho size "S" noodles**, available from Vietnamese Supermarket (\$1.39 for a 1-pound pack; 800/250-8897; vietnamesesupermarket.com).

Sicily

Buy **Tasca d'Almerita Regaleali Bianco**, available from Blanchards Wines and Spirits (\$14;

617/327-1400; blanchardsliquor.com); **COS Pithos 2008**, available from Italian Wine Merchants (\$50; 212/473-2323; italianwinemerchants.com); **Cottanera Etna Rosso 2007**, available from Chelsea Wine Vault (\$56; 212/462-4244; chelseawinevault.com); **Manenti Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2008**, available from Garnet Wines & Liquors (\$20; 800/872-8466; garnetwine.com); **Occhipinti Il Frappato 2008**, available from The San Francisco Wine Trading Co. (\$34; 415/731-6222; sfwtc.com); **Benanti Serra Della Contessa 2004** (2005 available for \$40), **Planeta Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2008** (\$21), **Passopisciaro 2007** (\$30), and **Benanti Pietramarina Etna 2007** (available in late March 2011 for \$40) from K&L Wine Merchants (877/559-4637; klwines.com); and **Bonavita Faro**, available from Woodland Hills Wine Co. (\$36; 800/678-9463; whwc.com). To make the Sicilian ricotta-filled pastries (see page 66), use **5 1/2" x 1" cannoli forms**, available from J. B. Prince (\$2.30 each; 800/473-0577; jbprince.com), **Amarena Fabbri Italian wild cherries in syrup**, available from Amazon.com, and **ricotta impastata**, available from specialty cheese shops. To make St. Joseph's Day fritters (see page 66) purchase **Amarena Fabbri Italian wild cherries in syrup** (see above) and **ricotta impastata** (see above), which you'll also need for the ricotta cake (see page 66).

Quebec Maple

To purchase Canadian maple syrup (see page 75), contact La Ferme Martinette for its **Canada No. 1 Extra Light syrup** (\$13.99 for a 250-milliliter bottle; 888/881-4561; lafermemartinette.com), Le Marche des Saveurs for the **Domaine Acer Canada No. 1 Light syrup** (\$15.50 for a 500-milliliter bottle; 514/271-3811; lemarchedesaveurs.com), Sucrerie de la Montagne for its **Canada**

No. 1 Medium syrup (price varies by availability; 450/451-0831; sucrerie lamontagne.com), Labonté for its **Canada No. 2 Amber syrup** (\$52 for a case of twelve 250-milliliter bottles; 819/758-3877; labonteinco.com), and Max Vite for **Shady Maple Farm's Extra Dark U.S. Grade B syrup**, comparable to Canada No. 3 (\$25.99 for a 750-milliliter bottle; 877/525-1700; maxvite.com). To make the crêpes with maple sugar and syrup (see page 80) and walnut-maple squares (see page 80), use **maple sugar**, available from Amazon.com (\$16.59 for a 1-pound bag; amazon.com).

Kitchen

Purchase different types of cassava in our glossary (see page 94): **garri flour**, available from Oyivo (\$10 for a 7-pound bag; 888/506-3265; oyivo.com); **Goya-brand frozen cassava**, available at most grocery stores and Hispanic markets (\$4 for a 24-ounce bag); **toasted cassava flour**, available from My Latin Food (\$4.47 for a 35-ounce bag; 954/358-9060; mylatinfood.com); **tapioca pearls**, available at most grocery stores or from My Spice Sage .com (\$7 for a 16-ounce bag; 877/890-5244; myspicesage.com); **sweet tapioca starch** (polvilho doce), available from AmigoFoods.com (\$3.79 for a 17.5-ounce bag; 800/627-2544; amigofoods.com); **Yuquitas-brand yuca chips** (\$4 for a 4-ounce bag), available from MexGrocer.com (877/463-9476; mexgrocer.com); **canned cassava**, available from The Latin Products (\$5.99 for a 28-ounce can; 800/694-8344; thelatinproducts.com); **cassareep** cassava sauce (\$13.99 for a 15-ounce jar) and **grated cassava** (\$1.29 for a 16-ounce bag), both available from Phil Am Food (201/963-0455; philamfood.com). Purchase **fresh cassava**, available from Amazon.com (\$26.83 for a 10-pound case; amazon.com). Try the **Prospect Park Sour cocktail** at The Clover Club (210 Smith Street, Brooklyn, New York; 718/855-7939).



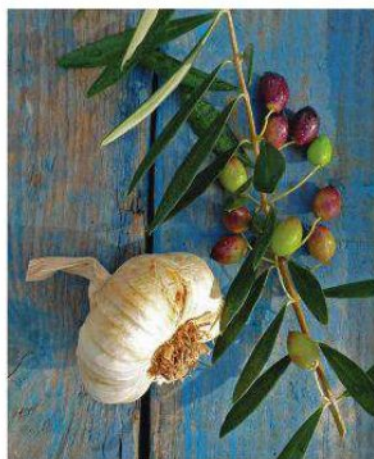
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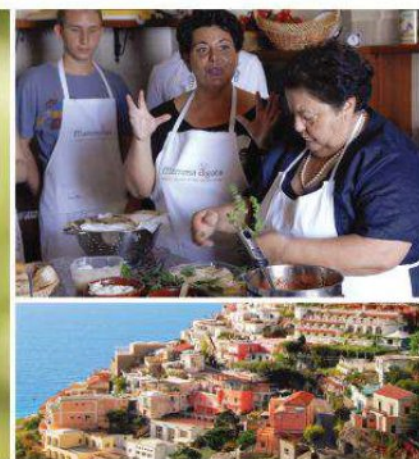
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MOMENT



TIME 7:00 A.M., May 11, 2010

PLACE Gros-Morne, Haiti

In a kitchen in northwest Haiti, the day begins earlier for some than it does for others.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAMIN TALAIE



Add an Italian accent to your DC getaway with La Dolce DC, a spring celebration of all things Italian, from arts and architecture to culture and cuisine.

Enjoy the Sweet Life in DC

A Admire DC's Italian-accented architecture: the stunning frescoes on the **Capitol dome**, painted by Constantino Brumidi, the neoclassical monuments on the **National Mall**, the striking style of the **Watergate**, the simple elegance of the **Embassy of Italy** and more.

B Honor the 150th anniversary of Italy's unification by examining how Italian Americans have left their mark on DC, from the Piccirilli brothers who carved the statue at the **Lincoln Memorial** to the Italian chefs that power up DC's dining scene.

C Catch *Venice: Canaletto and His Rivals* in its exclusive US engagement at the **National Gallery of Art** (Feb. 20-May 30). Savor Italian cuisine at the Gallery's Garden Café, featuring recipes from award-winning Chef Fabio Trabocchi.

D Explore how Italian art, culture and landscapes inspired a contemporary painter and printmaker as *Philip Guston: Roma* makes its only stop in the US at **The Phillips Collection** (Feb. 12-May 15).

E Take in inspiring arias as Plácido Domingo conducts final performances as Artistic Director of the **Washington National Opera** in Puccini's "Madama Butterfly" (Feb. 26-March 19) and Donizetti's "Don Pasquale" (May 13-27).

F Uncover surprising Italian treasures in DC's neighborhoods. Look for a statue of Dante in **Meridian Hill Park**, then head north on 16th Street to snap a photo of Marconi. Pick up Italian treats at **A. Litteri's** north of Capitol Hill or **Vace** in Cleveland Park.

G Delight in art like Leonardo da Vinci's "Ginevra de' Benci," his only work displayed in North America (at the **National Gallery of Art**), and architecture like the **Washington National Cathedral**, adorned by the works of Italian stone carvers.

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